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A lurid flame leaps forth, and directly a wall of fire was sweeping over the prairie, forming an impassable barrier between him and his enemies.

THE AVENGING ANGELS; OR, The Bandit Brothers of the Scioto. A BORDER AND INDIAN TALE.

By the Author of "The Silent Hunter," "Queen of the Woods," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE THREE FRIENDS.

ONCE more in the grim and green wilderness, surrounded by the forests which cover and conceal the hunting-grounds of the Cherokee and the Shawnee!

It is in the spring of the year 1769. Not a cabin, not a wigwam, lay hidden in those budding valleys, not a white man's foot has profaned their ancient silence. Far as the eye can reach, nothing but woods and prairies can be seen.

This night, and a long ridge of thick cloud, with a lurid upper edge, from which faint flashes of summer lightning occasionally coruscate, stretches over the western plains. Above these shine a few bright stars.

But for this angry line, from out of which the lightning leaped, it would have been a lovely night. Soon, however, the pent-up thunder spoke mutteringly from the clouds, and the lightning glared hotly. A strange sulphurous smell descended on the earth, and the way line turned to a pale-blue, barred with black and purple.

The thunder boomed again, but this time it rolled in long, heavy swells of sound, that seemed to break with shattering force against the dark vault of heaven.

The lightning was forked and the sheets flashed in fury.

But no rain fell.

The flame was dry, and seemed to crackle in the parched heavens. The ridge of cloud now broadened, and the pale, blue glimmer stretched full across the sky. It appeared as though the dark leaden clouds were smelting on the top, and as if, when thoroughly molten, they poured in forked and broken streams upon the plain.

On! on! sped the storm. The thunder became one continuous roar—the lightning one continuous, flashing flame.

A noise as of rushing wind filled the air, and then a dreadful darkness fell, like a pall, upon the earth; the moon and stars were blotted out, and only the blue ridge flashed the western sky.

On such a night, upon the confines of the dark and bloody ground, we introduce to our readers the principal characters of this history.

In the very midst of the mighty river, Ohio, under the black canopy of the storm, glides a long Indian canoe, while the thick

of the tempest is waking the forest echoes. It moves swiftly and steadily down-stream, urged, however, by only two men, who bow their heads to the blast.

"Is it much further?" asked one.

"I reckon it ar'n't as far as a hoss can gallop, nor as near as you can see, but ten minutes more 'ull put us pretty nigh," replied the other.

"I'm not sorry," said the first speaker, laughing, "for to my reckoning a bed and a supper, and some shelter, would be particularly agreeable."

"Ah! Tom, all you youngsters is in the same litter; your belly and your bed is all you think on."

"I tell you what, Steve, I like the rivers and the prairies as well as any man, but on such a night as this there's no good to be got by being out."

"Hist! lad, hist!—you'll soon be sick and comfortable. D'yer see yon belt o' pines? In course yer does. Well—my! if the Engine ar'n't lit a fire to guide us! He's a tall stick, and no mistake."

No further words were interchanged, both men keeping their eyes fixed on the red light that shone beneath the trees, and which they were rapidly nearing. Indeed, conversation was almost impossible with so great an uproar.

Every now and then there would be added to the din the awful crash of some mighty monarch of the forest, torn from its roots by the blast.

The fire, which was merely composed of a few pine-knots, cast one after another upon some hot embers, materially aided their advance, and, almost sheltered from the wind by the bank and trees, the canoe drew up close to the shore.

"All right, Kenewa," said the hearty voice of the trapper.

"Ugh!" was the soft but guttural reply of the Indian.

No more words were spoken, the red-skin waiting for them to secure the boat and take from it such articles as it contained. As soon as he saw the hunters loaded, he led the way through the pine thicket toward a high cliff, turned a corner, and ushered them into a cavern which served the purpose of a secret retreat and hunting-lodge.

They were just in time, for rain now began to fall, and soon poured down in solid sheets, while the thunder and lightning fast died away. Soon only a dim flash or a faint rumble came at intervals, but except that

the moans of the wind grew louder, the storm had expended its force.

The country to which we have introduced our readers is very celebrated for its caverns—it contains the most wonderful in the world—and the Indians readily availed themselves of them as caches, temporary hiding-places, or even on the war-trail or hunt as permanent residences.

The cavern which we have entered was about the size of a moderate room, with here and there an ornament in the way of deer's antlers, buffalo-heads, a shield, a bow, quivers, and arrows, while in a conspicuous place stood a long rifle. A fire burned in the center, while around were ranged couches of leaves that pleasantly invited repose.

It appeared that the meeting which had just taken place was preconcerted, for after the first greetings no more was said, the three men seating themselves round a fire, and proceeding to indulge in such creature comforts as their situation afforded.

While they are thus occupied, we can not do better than introduce them more formally to our readers.

The elder of the two white men was about forty years of age; yet he might have been taken for ten years younger, so full and smooth was his face, while his hair was of the raven hue of youth, and although cut very short, it still curled round his forehead and the borders of his broad brow. He was quite six feet four in his stockings, with stoutness to match.

His arms were long, and corded with iron muscles, fully developed and brought out by long years of endurance. His face, though tanned and battered by exposure to sun and storm, was a pleasant one to look upon; for his eyes were large, bright, and glistering; his features all perfect and regular, and his teeth most brilliantly bright and beautiful.

His dress was composed of the usual moccasins, leggings, and hunting-shirt of the prairies.

His companion, whose costume was the same, was a handsome, ruddy-faced youth of twenty, whose whole soul was in the life of the prairies.

The Indian remains.

His head was uncovered, and exhibited only the scalp-lock; his body was covered by a tunic of deer-skin, his legs with a kind of trousers formed of buck-skin, from which hung at occasional intervals the dreaded scalp-locks.

The forest rangers have lain them down, but he sits, with his rifle between his knees, watching.

At length his thoughts to all appearance take a new turn, and wrapping his blanket round him, he too sleeps.

When the first call of early morn awoke the white men, he was gone.

"What has become of Kenewa?" asked the young forest ranger.

"Don't know. Never can tell what an Engine is up to," replied Steve Smith.

"Eh? what! that he is, and a-calling us too, or else this infant is deaf or blind!"

"I heard only some of the forest birds."

"Birds!" cried Steve, opening his mouth with a huge grin. "D'ye call a owl a bird, and does they gen'rally sing in daylight? Kim along."

And snatching up his rifle, in which he was imitated by his companion, they both burst into the open air just as the Indian repeated his signal.

Making their way up the bank as best they could, they soon reached a small open prairie, and descried the Indian stooping over something on the ground, while a magnificent black horse stood motionless beside him.

"He's been a-shootin' sunthin'," said Steve.

"Then it's a man," replied Tom.

Next minute Tom's words were proved true by seeing the Indian rise, and, as he did so, assisting a man to do the same.

CHAPTER II.

A RIDE FOR LIFE.

ABOUT an hour before the occurrence alluded to in the previous chapter a horseman issued from a cane-brake, where he had passed the night, taking his way a little to the northward of west.

He was dressed in a neat and well-fitting suit of homespun, with high boots, a loose bear-skin cloak and cap, which could not conceal his intellectual head. His face glowed with manly beauty, though, to the casual observer, who had not seen it lit up with pleasure or wreathed with smiles, it appeared calm and cold and rather stern. His person was tall and commanding, and though quite young, he was very robust.

His horse was magnificent.

It was nearly coal-black, and as he dashed away over the prairie, looking like an angry storm-cloud, his glossy black breast and sides already covered with snow-flakes of foam, his wide nostrils distended, his long black mane floating like a wing of the tempest, master and steed seemed well suited to each other.

But the horseman had far to go; so when the first burst of animal spirits was satisfied he reined in the noble animal.

The traveler had arisen full of animation and hopeful feelings. But he had traveled so long through the lonely woods of Kentucky, riding for entire days without meeting a human being, that the solitude had begun to have its influence upon him. Moving along day by day through immense forests, silent and still as the grave itself, a man becomes naturally sad and nervous, starting at every crack of the dry leaf or rustling of the falling nut, and even at his own voice or throbbing heart.

Some such feelings had come over the young man, and in vain he endeavored to throw them off; for, like the still but heavy footsteps of a horrible nightmare, they continued to increase and weighed more and more upon him.

And yet it was morning, when every thing was bright and fresh, the air invigorating, and the woods alive with singing-birds, and he himself buoyed up by hope and golden anticipations.

He looked around upon hill and valley, and brook and moss-covered rock, admiring the glad scene spread out before him, and should have been as happy and gay as life and health and young years could make him.

But he could not. The shadow of some coming event, undefined and terrible, was upon his soul, and he could not cast it off. Again he pressed his horse to a trot to warm his blood and drive away care.

But this could not last long, as, not knowing the way, he was compelled to be careful and observant.

He had but a slight clue. Twenty miles west of the Ohio—twenty miles south of the Scioto: there was his rendezvous.

When he reined in his horse he was standing still in a narrow ravine, formed by the washings of a branch, with close overhanging sides, covered with thick undergrowth, and rising only a few feet above his head when sitting on his horse.

To his left was a kind of natural path to the summit of an eminence.

The young man resolved to ascend and examine the country around, and for this purpose dismounted from his horse, tied him to the branch of a tree, and clambered upward.

He did not go far ere he came to a kind of green flat, from whence he could look down upon the plain below.

It availed him little. Almost as far as the eye could reach, like the undulating waves of the ocean, spread the forest trees, trembling in the morning air, sighing and moaning like human beings.

To the right, however, at the mouth of the gully, is a strip of prairie that winds like a pathway through the forest, and which, fortunately, trends in the direction to be followed by the traveler.

Satisfied, the young man is about to descend, when he gives a visible start, and sinks cautiously on the ground.

What has he seen?

Gazing about fifty yards on the prairie is a drove of horses, so shaggy-looking and rough as to resemble the wild mustangs that roam from north to south, over the vast ocean meadows with which Providence has gifted this magnificent land.

But close at hand, round a camp-fire, in a hollow, are seated some twenty grim and painted warriors, braves on the hunt or the war-trail.

Which, the young man cares not to know; for equally they are his enemies; and even at that distance he can recognize the distinctive marks of the Shawnees.

What can be done? To return on his path is impossible, unless he would fail in his appointment, which is one of love and honor.

Forward he must, and to do so, he must pass the Indians.

How is this to be done? The youth asks of himself, and a smile of pride and satisfaction illumines his countenance, and his lips whisper two words.

With cautious step he descends the slope, and proceeds to mount his horse, no longer, however, the docile thing it usually is. As he mounted, the animal made one wild effort to unseat its rider; but with an iron hand the youth controlled the steed, which had scented the presence of its fellows.

As the young man neared the head of the gully he glanced forward, and at once discovered that the Indians were wholly concealed in the hollow.

Of course, therefore, they could not see him.

Walking his horse, the traveler prepared for the decisive moment.

It was a picture to behold him. He rode wonderfully lightly, yet sat his saddle to perfection, distributing his weight so admirably that his horse scarcely felt the pressure. He yielded to every movement made by the animal, and became, as it were, part and parcel of itself. He took care he should be neither strained nor wrung.

Freely and lightly as a feather was he borne along.

He is within a short distance from the hollow, when suddenly gathering up the reins, he patted the noble animal's neck.

At that moment the Indians, attracted by the neighing of their horses, rose, saw the intruder, and with a fearful war-cry, rushed, tomahawk in hand, to seize the enemy.

Too late!

Patting his neck and plunging the spurs into his sides, the young man has, as it were, lifted his horse into the air, sprung with one fearful bound over the heads of the Indians and across the hollow, where, pausing one moment, and one moment only, the gallant rider and gallant steed dashed beneath the leafy arches of the forest.

With a fearful yell of rage the savages mount and dash in pursuit, two motives impelling them onward: that of winning the white man's scalp and capturing that splendid creature.

"Well done, Black Ella!" said the young man, patting the animal on the neck, and checking the wild speed at which it would have dashed onward. "We have a long ride, my noble steed, and the red-skins are behind us."

In five minutes they could be heard yelling, shouting and menacing the fugitive, while urging their mettlesome horses to their utmost.

Nearly naked, in their war-paint, armed with lances and bows, a few only with guns, as they galloped through the forest they resembled a horde of demons let loose. They rode in the most admirable disorder, each

man choosing his own way, and dashing on-ward with frantic desire to win the prize.

The traveler saw their steeds were wiry and enduring, and if not so fleet as his own, perhaps able by perseverance to catch up to him in time. Once assured of this, he kept his animal in check, simply urging him to sufficient speed to avoid the arrows and other shots of the Indians.

This seemed to exasperate the red-skins, who shouted to him in the most opprobrious terms.

The traveler turned and waved his hand to them just as they reached the bottom of a pleasant slope, up which he knew his brave Black Ella would go with lightning speed.

Whip and spur were dashed into the wiry prairie horses, but of what avail? For the dark steed, with loosened reins, is going up that slope like a race-horse, and now the crest is reached.

Oh, horror!

It is a fissure—a wide and fearful fissure in the hill. There is, however, no time to check his foaming, panting animal, which cleared it at a bound, leaving the discomfited red-skins to cross a little lower down.

Taking advantage of this diversion, the young man allows Black Ella full swing, and seems to fly rather than to ride. This lasted an hour; when, just as they entered a flowery prairie, the gallant animal trod in a kind of rabbit hole, stumbled, and threw his rider.

The young man felt a tingling, burning sensation about the brain, his arms felt heavily, a dizziness and darkness settled over his eyes, and he lay senseless on the ground.

His insensibility, however, was not of long duration, and when he began to open his eyes he was not alone.

Kenewa, who had come forth with the dawn in search of game, soon found him, and was looking curiously at him when he opened his eyes.

His horse, Black Ella, appeared looking down upon him.

"My pale-faced brother has fallen," said the Indian, noticing that the other did not speak.

"My horse stumbled and fell," replied the young man; "but," he added, looking round, "where are the Shawnees?"

The Indian gave a slight start, looked keenly round, and just as his companions came up, asked how far the enemy were behind.

He, however, needed no reply, as at that moment at some distance could be heard the tramp of the Indian horsemen.

The young chief without a word pointed to the river, indicating a very different path to that by which the trappers had come. They silently obeyed, after assisting the stranger to mount his horse.

The Indian remained behind, and no sooner were his companions a few yards from him than he began his operations.

The small prairie was covered in parts by a tall dry grass, in others by reeds, while close at hand was a small clump of trees. The sun was already hot, and was drying the ground rapidly. To collect moss, dry twigs and grass was the work of a moment, and next instant, by the aid of powder, flint and steel, a large fire was blazing. A few pine knots were added, and then the whole was scattered.

Then the prairie was on fire, and the Indian's plan was about to be realized.

See where the fire begins: a little curl of smoke, a tiny flame struggles for a moment for life. The slightest breath of air falls upon it—a gleam, scarce larger than a firefly among the tangled leaves—and in an instant a lurid flame leaps forth, is kindled into a furnace-like glare, and directly a wandering hill of flame was sweeping resistlessly over the prairie. The harvest was ready for the flame sickle, the sapless and withered stalks were waiting the reaping.

See where, with bounds swifter and longer than an antelope ever compassed, it crosses the tallest leaves, runs stealthily along like a golden serpent, darting spitefully its forked tongue of living flame on every side, while crackling, hissing, roaring, its terrible writhings uncoil.

He was burning up the trail.

He then moved away in the direction taken by his companions, but halted to watch the progress of the conflagration. As he did so a dense column of smoke rose to windward, a loud crackling was heard, and out burst the flames. The clump of forest, with the thick and dry undergrowth, was on fire. The tall reeds, the thick bushes, the lofty trees, had been caught by the fierce and ruthless element, which, driven by the morning breeze, galloped over the surface of the ground, pouring vast clouds of smoke onward as an advanced guard, beneath which the subtle flame crept on and on, until the whole strip was one sheet of fire. The tall grass cracked like musketry, the thick bushes sent forth a sputtering sound, the lofty trees groaned as if in anguish, and the whole combined, gave vent to a roar so terrific that every animal fled, scared by the awful sound.

When the conflagration was at its height, the Shawnees came up, one by one, and forming in a line gazed in amazement on the fiery barrier which so suddenly interposed between themselves and their vengeance.

Kenewa smiled, and rejoined his companions, who were waiting for him on the water's edge.

He said nothing, but taking the horse's head led it out into the water until he himself was up to his armpits, and then, the trappers following, he slowly descended the stream to his hiding-place, which in a few minutes was safely reached, the horse and canoe secreted, and the four men concealed within the cavern.

The denizens of the forest, white and red alike, consider it the first part of politeness not to ask a guest either his name or his business, waiting until he shall speak himself. The trappers and Kenewa, the Huron, were no exceptions. They therefore laid food before the young man, slices of wild turkey and venison, with rum and water, to which he did moderate justice.

When he pushed away his bark plate he leaned back for a moment in silence.

"And now, my friends," he said, "let me thank you from my heart for your kindness, and ask another favor."

"Speak up, stranger," cried Steve.

"You may know, trapping in this beautiful country, of a friend of mine, who has left the civilized settlements to camp in the wilderness."

"Hem!" said Steve, with a suspicious glance.

"I mean Judge Mason," replied the stranger.

"And pray, young man," continued the trapper, "if this child may be so bold for to ask, what does yer want with Judge Mason?"

"I am Roland Edwardes, the affianced husband of Ella Mason, returning from Europe with good news for the Judge."

"I thought I knew him," said Tom, with a ringing laugh, "but two years have changed us both, since he doesn't know either Tom Smith or Steve Kenton."

The young man stared and held out his hand, which the others took heartily, and some minutes were spent in congratulations.

"My head has not quite recovered the blow," he said, smiling, "still your voices and faces seemed familiar. Delighted to see you. What are you doing here?"

"A little of everything," cried Steve.

"Yer see, the Judge, he kinder can't keep us altogether now; so we traps on our own account, not forgetting to visit our old master now and then, with a turkey, or a buck, or such like."

"Will you guide me there at once?"

"By water, cap'n? yes; but what of yer horse?"

"My horse must remain here, then," said Roland, with a look of regret. "But why not journey through the woods?"

"As the leaves on the trees are the Shawnees. The dogs ambush in every tree; the neutral hunting-grounds are made foul by the steps of impure red-skins. I have spoken."

And the Indian, taking his gun, prepared to depart, and, all doing the same, in a few minutes the whole party were gliding upstream, close in shore.

CHAPTER III. THE BANDITS OF THE SCIOTO.

THE storm is still raging.

About twenty miles to the westward was a narrow gorge or pass in the hills. The dark shadows of declining day were about to close over the scene. A kind of rude hut of somewhat large dimensions has been hastily erected, and inside this may be seen five men seated round a fire. They are all about six feet in height, their hair is as black as the wing of a raven, and falls long and straight, without a curl, on their shoulders.

Their features are massive, and their eyes, as black as their hair, glared out, keen, piercing and glittering from beneath their heavy and shaggy eyebrows. Their dress was composed of coarse, gray colored cloth, made loose to their forms, and consisted only of a half-frock, half-coat, and pair of trousers.

Their bosoms are bare, while round their necks are red handkerchiefs.

The covering of their heads consists of a peaked wooden hat, originally white but now gray and dirty.

Five awful ruffians to look at, and as wicked as they look. They are the Five Bandit Brothers of the Scioto.

The entrance to the pass where the low log-hut is situated is shaded by a few hickory trees.

The five men are seated round a huge dish of venison, which smoked on a table, made of the trunk of a large tree.

Rifles and powder-horns compose the only furniture of the room, if we may except some skins on the floor, for beds.

It would have been difficult for the imagination to conceive a scene more gloomy than that which the interior of this hut exhibited. The low fire, the candles burning nearly to their sockets, the fierce faces of the men, their lowering brows and hideous expression of countenance.

"I for one," said the elder of the band, Moses Horne, who sat at the head of the table, "am tired of this skulking life and would return where there are crochets and girls. What's the use of money if we can not spend it?"

"True," replied all the men in chorus.

"But, Mo," said one, more cunning, more saturnine, more fiendish-looking than any of them, "do you think that the little affair is sufficiently blown over?"

"What little affair?" asked Moses with a sneer.

"That Ames' settlement business," replied the other, lazily.

"And do you suppose," continued Moses, in the same way, "that I propose returning to any place where we are known? No. We must realize our own goods, and descend to the seaboard, where our bad fame, doubtless, has not reached."

The robbers laughed heartily, and even the suspicious Juke was satisfied.

A huge draught of liquor having settled this matter, Moses called for silence.

And now, brothers, before we plan our line of march to the settlements, I have a story to tell you, and that will amuse you much," he said, sardonically.

"Out with it," they cried.

"You recollect old Judge Mason?" he began.

A roar from his brothers interrupted him.

"Silence!" shouted Moses, their captain, in a stentorian voice, "and listen. Do not speak all at once. You, Juke, answer me first. What have you to say against him?"

"That, on an unproved accusation of stealing horses, he gave me a hundred lashes on my bare back, and then rode me on a rail out of the settlement."

And the burly robber winced at the remembrance of the awful punishment.

"Speak, Murdoch," continued Moses.

"On suspicion that I was concerned in a burglary, of which I knew nothing, he stuck me in the pillory, cut off one ear, and promised me the other should follow, if I showed myself again in those parts. Curse him!"

"Titus, what have you to say?"

"He condemned me to be hung, and actually made me stand before a grinning crowd, with halter round my neck, expecting every minute to be swung up. He then let me off; but the mob stripped me, then tarred and feathered me, and I only missed burning by the way I made tracks."

And the bandit finished the sentence with an awful oath.

"And now, Hercules Horne, what is your experience?"

"You know it," he replied, gloomily.

"Six months in the county jail, public exposure every week, the brand, and then worse—"

"How worse, are we?"

"The only woman who might have saved me got married while I was in prison—poisoned against me during my absence. But," he said, dreamily, "I had my revenge."

"How so?"

"The night I came out I killed the man—left him weltering in his blood, and she for dead on the floor. Ha! ha! I expect James Keating wished he had never seen her."

"True, brother," said Moses, solemnly; "but, now, let me remind you that Judge Mason was accounted rich, that he owned more plate and jewelry than any man in the colonies, that his remittances in gold from England were heavy, and that had we not

been expelled so suddenly we should have made a fine haul and satisfied our revenge."

"True; but why speak of this now?"

"Judge Mason was always fond of sports, and liked to possess a vast territory of his own."

"Yes—yes?"

"He liked not too much habitation around him."

"We know."

"Well, Judge Mason," continued the bandit, slowly, "weiried of settled life, and anxious to found a new colony where for many years he might enjoy his sports, with only a few neighbors about him, has emigrated."

"Where?"

"HERE!"

The men started wildly to their feet.

"Be still, my brothers; hasty counsels are never good. I will explain."

The brothers seated themselves.

About six months ago Judge Mason acquired a large grant of land in our district, and leaving his old home, came out to select a new residence."

"Ah! ah!" they cried, in chorus.

"With him came his two sons and two laborers, who erected a temporary home, and began to clear, to be ready for the spring, when all his cattle, slaves, and dependents will come up to join him."

A murmur of deep satisfaction followed.

"But this is not all," continued the ruffian, with dark, glistening eyes.

"Speak out, Mo. Don't keep us in suspense."

"Besides his servants and his sons, he brought with him his famed iron chest."

"Hurrah! hurrah!" burst from the lips of the robbers.

"And besides his iron chest, his two beautiful, lovely, juicy-lipped daughters."

The uproar now became frantic, and for some minutes the bandit-chief allowed the demon gang around him to expend their satisfaction in outcries and oaths. At length, however, he obtained silence.

"Now I need not tell you," he continued, "that ere we start all this must be ours; and that while we win a fortune we glut our revenge."

All frantically agreed.

"The distance is nothing; so that when morning breaks, we can start and assail the place before they are up. But I have a proposition to make. I do not want to kill the old man; death would be sweet to him after what he will have to see. Therefore, he must not recognize us—we must go as Indians. Let our friends, the Shawnees, bear the blame."

Loud was the laugh at this proposition, which well suited the temper of this gang of almost unequalled ruffians.

"How do you know all these wonderful things, brother Mo?" asked Juke, suddenly.

Something approaching to a blush spread itself over the tawny countenance of the chief, though as it is not allowed that such ruffians can blush, it might have been a sign of anger.

"Well, if you wish to know, you can. The elder laborer has in his pocket a single daughter, Martha by name, a child almost; a pretty, rosy cherub, who is to be mine. You understand me—mine, and mine only."

The brothers bowed their willing consent, and then, as they had to rise before dawn, prepared themselves for rest.

Never did five more incarnate fiends prepare for evil than these five brothers, the dreaded renegades, who, in a few moments, lay deep in slumber.

(To be continued.)

The Blackfoot Queen:

OR,
OLD NICK WHIFFLES IN THE VALLEY OF DEATH.

A Sequel to "The Phantom Princess."

BY CAPT. J. F. C. ADAMS,
AUTHOR OF "THE PHANTOM PRINCESS; OR, NED HAZEL, THE BOY TRAPPER."

CHAPTER X. IN THE WOODS.

At this critical juncture, a shadowy arm passed over the shoulder of Ned Mackintosh, and grasped his rifle in such a manner that when the trigger was pressed, the hammer fell upon the sinewy fingers instead of the percussion.

"What do you mean?" demanded the excited young man, turning angrily upon Whiffles; "are you a friend of that red demon's?"

"Easy; I've been watching the varmint, Ned, and, if there was any danger of his harmin' a hair of her head, my ball would have been ahead of yorn; but, he's only done it to scare her; he thinks too much of her to want to lose her by his own foolishness. Look ag'in and tell me what you see."

Cast his eyes in the direction of the lodge, the lover saw that Red Bear had retreated and seated himself again—another proof of the superior sagacity of the old trapper.

"Here's your pencil and your paper; take 'em and get out of this, fur it ain't safe to trust you here. I'll take yer place."

Ned did as commanded, withdrawing deep into the woods, where he was certain of being beyond the sight and hearing of friends and enemies alike. He held in his hand a letter from Miona, and he was determined to read it, even though he was compelled to risk not a little in doing so.

Reaching a spot where he felt all was secure, he crouched down upon the ground, like a man engaged in doing a guilty thing, and cautiously raked some dry leaves together. Upon these he spread a number of dead twigs, and then drawing forth his match-safe struck and touched a light to them.

As the twig blazed flamed up, he looked furtively around; but he was in a sort of hollow and dense undergrowth which inclosed him on every side, and leaning over the blaze, he eagerly devoured the hastily written lines.

"DEAREST EDWARD:

"What you and Nick Whiffles do, must be done to-night, for I am to be taken back to the village to-morrow, where I will be more closely guarded than my poor father was four years ago. I have been expecting you, knowing that you must have escaped, thinking your love would have hastened your movements more than they have; and when I was taken here, I was really in despair, for I thought you would never find me. I am more glad than I can tell you that you are so near me, and I hope soon to see you, and clasp in the arms of father and mother, who, you said, were going to cross the ocean with you. I shall wait and listen for some signal from Nick, and be ready to perform my part in ending this dreadful captivity, that becomes worse and worse each day—"

Then followed some very loving manifestations, and it closed with a prayer and the signature, "Thine Own."

The Phantom Princess, during the years spent in the wilds of America, had not forgotten her duty to her child, and so it came to pass that she expressed herself with as much fluency upon paper, as she did in conversation, and Ned Mackintosh, in his romantic love for her, at times fancied that she still excelled him in her literary knowledge.

The precious letter was carefully read over, and the tiny fire was hastily stamped out and all was darkness again.

"I shall have to let Nick know what I have been doing," he soliloquized, as he walked away, "for he must be made to understand that it won't do to wait till to-morrow before moving further in this case."

He heard nothing from the other lodge in which the light shone, but, as he carefully made his way to where Nick was still acting the part of guardian, he caught the glimpse of a moving figure in front of Miona's cabin, and he instantly inquired of Nick what it meant.

"Red Bear has just left to go to the other cabin. I think he's goin' after that old squaw he help carry the gal to the canoe."

And we are to lie here and look on?"

The trapper replied to this question by uttering a low whistle, which instantly caught the listening ear of Miona. She threw a sort of blanket around her shoulders, started to her feet and came to the entrance of the lodge, looking around in the darkness for some other aiding signal.

The whistle was repeated, and the next moment she came hurrying across the clearing, and immediately after was with her friends.

The time was critical, but Ned Mackintosh took the slight figure in his stout arms and pressed her fervently to him, kissing her face again and again, and murmured:

"Miona, my own, I have you at last, and no power on earth shall separate us again."

She could only sob and murmur her love in return, while Nick couldn't see the necessity of either just then.

"There! there! that'll do," said he; "wait till we get where the varmints are a little more scarce than here."

Mackintosh released the girl from his embrace, but still fondly holding one hand in his own, turned to the old trapper, and said:

"Lead the way, Nick, and we will follow."

Back again across the clearing the three shadowy figures stealthily made their way, while Calamity, like the pointer of a hunter, trotted in advance.

Just within the cover of the wood, Whiffles paused a moment, and touching the shoulder of Mackintosh pointed to the lodge they had just left. Following the direction of his finger, the two saw Red Bear and his mother hurrying toward the building, with the intention of taking the "queen" forcibly to the village.

Time was precious, and without waiting another moment, the three groped through the wood until they reached the edge of the creek, where the canoe lay. Noiselessly and speedily they took their seats in this, and Nick pushed out into the stream.

Instead of turning the prow downward toward Elk River, he continued on up the creek, several powerful strokes of his paddle sending the boat directly by the lodges, and on into the gloom beyond.

This was barely accomplished when a couple of quick whoops announced that the flight of Miona had been discovered, and the hurried search had already begun. With the signal of alarm, the girl shrunk closer to the side of her lover, as if she felt that there was now her only safety.

"Have no fear," he whispered, as he gathered his arm about her; "they shall never, never, take you from me."

"I know it," she replied, her heart full of a delight which had only come to her dreamily and vaguely during the past years.

Nick Whiffles' whole attention was given to the management of the boat, which he sped forward with astonishing power and speed. It was observable that the creek was narrowing, and the current was growing more rapid as they advanced. Only a few miles more could the water be turned to account. The trapper was carrying out the purpose he had announced, of attempting their escape by a new route. Instead of going down into the river, he intended to pass overland across the country to the stream which found its way into the south branch of the Saskatchewan, and so on to Fort Churchill in the Far North, where the parents of Miona were so anxiously awaiting her coming.

With the sounds of alarm that Red Bear made, when the flight of the girl was discovered, all outcry ceased, and the fugitives knew not what steps were being taken by way of pursuit. Nick believed that the Blackfeet would entertain no suspicion of what had taken place until the morning, and their efforts would all be misdirected between now and then, so that these precious hours would be so much gained.

This pleasant belief, however, was dispelled by a discovery which Miona made at this moment. She told her lover that in the hurry of her flight from the lodge, at the summons of her friends, she had dropped the note he had sent her upon the ground, where she had left it lying, and where it would be sure to catch the eye of Red Bear, the moment he entered and found she had fled.

"But I don't think he will be able to read it," she added, as Ned told it to Nick, "as he hasn't much education in the English language."

"That is unnecessary," replied the trapper; "he'll know what it means the very minute he sets eyes on it, and he'll know that me and Ned have run away with you."

"But he will not suspect we have taken this direction," replied Mackintosh.

"He won't know it, but he'll suspect it, as like as not he's follerin' hard after us this very minute."

"Let him follow!" exclaimed Mackintosh.

"If he catches us, are we powerless to help ourselves? For my part I can't help believing I would experience a genuine pleasure in using that treacherous scamp as a target."

Why was he so fool enough to leave Miona alone, when it was so easy for her to slip out and make off?"

"He wouldn't have done it, if he had known we war about, and she wouldn't have run away, if she hadn't known we was."

Now and then Nick paused in his paddling for a few seconds and listened, but nothing of his pursuers was heard, and the only sound that reached their ears was that of the wind blowing through the trees around them.

The three noticed that quite a breeze was blowing, and that it was irregular and increasing. The faint moon, too, was obscured by drifting clouds, and there was every indication of a rapidly approaching storm.

The air was quite chilly, and Nick declared that a drenching, driving rain would be upon them by daybreak.

"Will that be favorable or unfavorable to us?" asked Ned.

"It will be the worst thing in the world, for we've got to stop till the storm ends, and that'll give the varmints the time they want to find where we've gone, and the chances are they'll overhaul us afore we kin git across to the other stream."

"But we are leaving no trail."

"That don't make no difference; just as soon as they'll know we've headed toward the north, they'll know what pint I'm aimin' for, and they'll know how to head us off."

"Then we can turn back and take another direction."

Nick made no reply, for he did not wish to alarm his companions, but the course proposed by Mackintosh was the very one he wished to avoid. Turned back into the country again, with a band of Blackfeet between him and British territory, it would be almost impossible to escape discovery or recapture by these bloodhounds, who would watch every avenue of escape, and close around the three, with a celerity and certainty almost impossible to thwart.

Nick Whiffles knew another thing that was not especially pleasant to him, although no reference to it had yet escaped his lips, and it was certain that it would never be learned by any others through him.

His position toward Woo-wol-na was in one respect an anomalous one. The gratitude which that chief still retained for services done many years before, was such as to cause him to overlook the part he had acted in the rescue of Hugh Baudinman from death; but, in forgetting that, the forbearance of the Blackfoot leader had reached its utmost limit. It was certain that he would discover the part played by Nick in this business, which was far more serious in every respect.

nin'. We ain't ten miles from the lodges, and there's no tellin' how near a dozen of the varmints are to us."

He said no more, but he might have added that there was a conviction upon him that the real danger of the undertaking had just begun, and that a terrible experience was to come upon them in the next few hours.

CHAPTER XI. THE SIGNAL FIRES.

The light rapidly increased, and the fugitives were soon able to gain some idea of their situation. They found they were ascending a gradually-sloping ridge, several hundred feet in height, and were yet quite a distance from the top.

Deeming it useless to carry the canoe any further, Nick left it where it had served the purpose of sheltering them, and they resumed their flight without delay. All three were hungry, and had no more food in their possession; but the trapper was desirous of reaching the top of the ridge before halting for breakfast.

Miona felt the need of sustenance, but she was not the one to make her want known in the presence of danger, and she walked along cheerily and bravely, in the same hopeful spirits as her lover, who seemed never weary of looking upon and admiring her beauty. This was the first time he had seen her in the glare of sunlight since the long years ago, when he had met her like a wood-nymph, while visiting his traps in the wood, and he looked upon her with that fond, loving look born of pure, deep affection, and which was returned by her own lustrous eyes.

Her dress was almost entirely Indian in its character, and yet arranged with a taste that set off her beauty, perhaps, to greater advantage than a civilized costume would have done.

Although the shadow of a great danger constantly hung over them, yet they forgot it for the time in the pleasure of each other's society, and they chatted and laughed, and talked of the past, the present and the future, as though there never was to be any thing but sunshine, and love, and happiness for them.

"Let 'em talk—let 'em talk," mused the old trapper, as he occasionally glanced at them: "it would be a condemned pity if I should stop 'em, for there's no tellin' how soon they'll have to hush anyway. I only wish we had a dozen hours of darkness afore us, I think I could feel easy then."

While communing with himself, he was constantly looking before, behind, and all around him, as though in the momentary expectation of some great danger.

"This rain has wiped out our trail," he added, "but it's 'bout sartin' that that Red Bear knows where we've started fur, and if he ain't close behind us, like 'nough he's on ahead somewhere."

At the end of half an hour they were at the summit of the ridge, and they took the leisure to look about them. Their view to the rear was so extensive that they could trace the creek up which they had ascended for a long distance, on its winding way through the woods. Nick even indicated the point where were the ruins of the Blackfoot village, although the woods at this point were so dense that the view was indistinct and unsatisfactory.

Long and intently the three scanned the intervening stretch of forest and broken country, seeking to catch some glimpse of their enemies, but none were able to discover the first indications of pursuit.

"It ain't no sign they ain't follerin' us," remarked Nick, after the failure of their scrutiny, "for the varmints ar' cummin', and could dodge into cover and watch us all day without our gettin' sight of one of their top-knots."

Turning to the north, a pleasant scene was spread out before them. The ridge sloped away as gradually in that direction as in the other, while about ten miles distant rose another ridge almost precisely similar to the one upon which they were standing. Between these two spread out a low, beautiful valley, through which several streams meandered; the whole country was covered with wood, although it was more scattered in some places than in others, and at certain points the ground was rocky and rugged.

Looking away to the north, the same valley could be traced until wood and stream grew indistinct and mingled with the hazy blue of the horizon.

Across the intervening tract of territory some ten miles in extent, as has been shown—it was necessary for the party to push their way, before they could feel warranted in enjoying any degree of safety.

"On 't'other side that ridge," said Nick, "is the creek that runs into the south branch of the Saskatchewan. Ef we can once git into my canoe on that without the varmints bein' in fray, I'll feel easy."

"Then let us delay no longer," said Miona.

"We've got to have somethin' to eat, or we'll find a considerable difficulty in travelin'." You see, we ain't goin' to reach 't'other side much afore night, and we can't do it on empty stomachs."

"Shall we not be incurring extra danger by kindling a fire in such an elevated position?" asked Mackintosh.

"Yes," was the reply: "we must go fur 'nough down the slope to make sure they won't see us."

They descended entirely to the bottom, where Ned Mackintosh and Miona busied themselves in starting a fire, while Nick, cautioning them not to wander away, set out in quest of their breakfast.

The trapper's usual luck did not attend him this time. After hunting for a long time without getting a shot, he lost all patience, and producing the line that he always carried with him, cast it into the nearest stream. Here, in a few minutes, he hauled out several plump fish, which he quickly gathered up and carried back to camp, where his friends were anxiously expecting him.

The fire had been replenished several times, and it required but a few minutes more for the preparation of their morning meal. All were very hungry, and when they had finished their repast, it was found that there was none at all left to take away with them against the return of hunger.

But they could well afford to wait twenty-four hours, and Nick declared that they must think no more of food until they were out of this dangerous valley, and safe on the other side of the ridge.

"By mighty!" he exclaimed, looking up to the sky, "I don't know where the day has gone, but it's blamed near noon this minute."

It seemed impossible to believe this declaration, but a glance at the sun showed that he was not far from the truth, and the

three hurried forward upon their journey, like persons guilty of some great dereliction of duty for which they were anxious to atone.

The ground was found to be very uneven, so that it was impossible to make any sort of progress such as they desired; but they pressed steadily on until the afternoon was well advanced, when an unexpected obstacle presented itself.

While leading the way, Nick Whiffles suddenly found himself upon the bank of a rushing torrent too broad to leap over, and too deep to think of wading. He paused in amazement for a few seconds, not understanding what it meant, as he had not noticed this stream when standing upon the ridge in the morning; but a moment's reflection told him that it was all very natural, being caused by the heavy fall of rain in the night, and which had not time to gather until after the whites were down the slope and into the valley.

What was to be done? was the involuntary question that rose to the lips of all, as they stood on the bank of the rushing, muddy torrent, and felt that some means must be devised for reaching the other side.

"It has risen very suddenly," said Miona; "why can we not wait till it subsides again?"

"I won't do it afore to-morrow," replied Nick; "we must get over somehow or other. If we can't do it here, we must find a spot where we kin."

There was reason to hope that there was some place where this could be accomplished in safety, and the three began searching along the bank for such a point.

This consumed more precious time, and with a feeling of alarm that it would be difficult to depict, they saw the afternoon drawing to a close, while no more than half the distance across the valley was passed.

Finally a projecting rock was discovered, from the edge of which it seemed possible to make the leap.

"I think that'll answer," said Nick, as he carefully measured the distance with his eye. "I've jumped further when I was younger, but the difficulty, you see, is with the gal."

"Am I the only trouble?" asked Miona.

"That's it—hulloa!"

As the exclamation escaped the trapper, Miona made a light leap as though she intended to spring into the water, but instead, she landed as lightly as a fawn upon the opposite bank, leaving quite a space between where her feet struck and the edge of the stream.

An exclamation of surprise escaped from the two she had left upon the other side, and she looked saucily back and called out:

"Beat that if you can!"

Mackintosh made a sudden run and jumped with might and main, his feet striking in the footprints of the girl.

Nick immediately followed, landing a little short.

Calamity looked at his friends a moment, and then turned about, as though he considered such a performance too undignified for him, and then stepping into the torrent began swimming his way over.

The current was so rapid, that it was a work of extreme difficulty for him, but he struggled bravely and succeeded in making the other shore, although he was carried quite a distance down-stream.

But the passage was safely made, and all were considerably elated thereat. In searching for this point they had been forced quite a distance up-stream, and not a little out of their way; but still the long, elevated ridge stretched out across their path, and all they had to do was to reach and pass that. On the other side flowed the stream, which they believed was to bear them into a haven of safety. There were still a goodly number of miles before them, and it was impossible to cross the ridge before night should set in, but if there were no Blackfeet close in their rear, there was reason to hope for a safe deliverance.

They had been over the stream but a few minutes, and were picking their way carefully along, when Calamity showed so much uneasiness that it attracted the attention of all. He whined now and then, and elevating his head sniffed the air in a way which showed he scented danger.

Nick Whiffles did not check his speed, until they had gone some distance further, where he walked to the top of a rock to make his observation, his two friends following him.

First he looked to the ridge which they had crossed, and as he did so, he was seen to start and heard to utter "By mighty!"

Both Mackintosh and Miona gazed in the same direction; but, although both were gifted with a keen eyesight, and both had an extensive experience in wood-craft, they failed to discover the exciting cause of his alarm.

The trapper stood for perhaps three minutes looking intently and unwaveringly at the ridge, and then he turned square about and looked the other way.

"By mighty!" was the expression that escaped him, with more emphasis than before, and then he looked back and forth from one ridge to another.

Very naturally his companions began to feel some concern at his manner, and Miona inquired what it meant.

"Look yender!" he replied pointing to the ridge on the left, "and tell me whether you see any thing."

"We have been looking in both directions," replied Mackintosh, "and can not divine what it is."

Nick now indicated the precise point and added:

"Don't look among the trees, but above 'em."

"Ah! a camp-fire!" exclaimed Ned.

"No; it ain't—it's a signal-fire!" corrected Nick.

Just the faintest, dimmest outlines of a column of smoke could be seen rising through the tree-tops on the opposite ridge; and, while carefully scanning it, Ned observed that it did not ascend in a straight line, as it would have done from a stationary fire, but that it waved from side to side, in a serpentine manner, showing that the flame which caused it was regularly changed from one spot to another.

"How is that?" inquired Ned, after remarking this peculiar appearance, "I do not understand it."

"I've seen that thing afore," replied Nick, almost sullenly; "one of the varmints is in the top of the tree with a torch in his hand. Now take a look at 't'other ridge."

This was done, and precisely the same thing was seen upon the summit of that.

"There must be an Indian in one of those trees too?"

"Yes, and a whole pack of 'em at the bottom, too; they've been watchin' us all the afternoon and signaling to each other.

They know just where we are this minute, and they're putting things in shape to gobble us."

Nick seemed in a more despondent mood than either of his companions had noticed since starting, and they naturally partook of his mental depression.

He chafed at the remembrance of his delay in getting across this ten-mile valley. Here the better part of a day had been spent in wandering about in full view of their enemies, and there was no possibility now of deceiving them as to their movements.

They could only wait until darkness closed about them, and then attempt to steal over the ridge without being discovered. There was a possibility of this, but Nick Whiffles was satisfied in his own mind that Red Bear and others were closer to them than his companions suspected.

The infuriated Blackfoot had not concluded to wait until night, but was doubtless stealing through the wood after them.

What meant the uneasiness of Calamity, but that danger was close at hand? Remarkable as was the sagacity of the canine, his master knew that he had not seen, or having seen, did not understand the meaning of the signal-fires in the distance.

There was something else that alarmed him. It was in the woods, close about them.

"What is it, pup?" asked Nick, as he retreated from his exposed position upon the rock; "do you smell the varmints?"

There was nothing particularly noticeable in his reply, but it was of such a character that his master grasped his rifle more firmly, and said in a low tone to Mackintosh:

"Be ready for the varmints any minute."

"I am ready," replied Ned, feeling in his breast-pocket to make sure his revolver was there. "It is getting dark, and if we can keep out of their way until night, I have hopes of giving them the slip."

"If we hadn't got hindered so in crossin' this blamed place, there'd be a better chance for us, but it's going to be the condemnedest difficulty we ever was in afore."

Nick Whiffles did not forget that his companions had not slept a wink upon the preceding night, unless they might have snatched a few minutes when in the canoe, and he had the strongest doubts of their ability to stand the strain to which they would be subjected through the coming darkness.

But there was a present danger which now required all his thoughts, and he led his friends stealthily and slowly through the wood, so as to escape the observation of any who were stationed on an elevated lookout.

Suddenly Calamity gave such unmistakable evidence of uneasiness that all paused, feeling that the danger was so close at hand that there was no need of attempting to proceed further.

CHAPTER XII.

PURSUED BY SHADOWS.

NICK WHIFFLES stood with gun grasped in both hands, ready to fire at an instant's warning, while Ned Mackintosh held almost precisely the same position directly in the rear of him, the affrighted Miona, pale, motionless and almost breathless at his side.

A dozen feet in advance crouched Calamity, growling and bristling with anger, the only member of the party who was making the least sound.

"Sh! pup," admonished the trapper; there's no need of making a noise, but keep your head p'inted toward the varmints."

The dog quieted down, but his appearance showed that he was anxious at something that was rapidly approaching, and that at the same time, he was agitated by an undefined fear, such as Mackintosh had never seen him show before.

This painful state of suspense was ended suddenly and unexpectedly by the appearance of an enormous grizzly bear that came awkwardly shuffling through the woods directly toward them.

As quick as thought Mackintosh brought his rifle to his shoulder, but ere he could sight it at the approaching monster, Nick furiously gesticulated, and called out in an excited undertone:

"Don't you do it!"

There was no disregarding that command, even though the king of the wilds was almost upon them. Catching the arm of Miona, the two walked rapidly backward, he holding his gun so as to use it effectively, while he kept his eye fixed upon the brute, coming straight at them.

As Calamity was exactly in the path of the bear, his sagacity taught him that the only thing for him to do was to get out of it without attempting to dispute the right of way with this king of the western wilds. So, wheeling about he skurried behind his master, still snarling and growling and ready to mingle in the fray, as soon as an opportunity offered.

It was a trying moment. Nothing but absolute, undeniable necessity could induce Nick to fire, for he knew that the crack of a rifle would be sure to guide the Blackfeet to the very spot, where they were standing.

Instead of firing, therefore, he threw up both hands, and sprang directly toward the bear uttering a suppressed exclamation as he did so. The bear uttered a snuff of terror and then shied off to the left, and at a faster gait than ever, galloped away in the wood.

"Now, come," called out Nick, plunging into the forest and taking a course at right angles; "the varmints ain't far off."

With that sharpness of perception, which was almost intuitive with the trapper, he comprehended from the action of the grizzly bear, the instant he came in sight, that he was fleeing from before the Indians, who had roused or unexpectedly come across him in the woods.

The brute made no attempt to disturb either Calamity or his friends, and his advance upon them was merely because they happened to be in his path, shying away, the moment Nick added to his terror by "shoo-ing" in his face.

The Blackfeet were so close that the crack of a rifle would have brought them to the spot, ere they could have fled, and hence the prompt, imperative manner in which Nick Whiffles checked the shot that was almost discharged from the gun of Ned Mackintosh.

By this time the sun had set, and the gloom of twilight was already in the wood. Every moment was growing more favorable to the whites, and with something like a renewal of hope, they hurried through the shadowy forest.

Calamity gave no sign of apprehension, but glided deftly through the undergrowth, keeping a good lead of the others, and comprehending very well the direction his master wished him to pursue.

Suddenly the sharp and near crack of a rifle rung among the trees, and, confident that one of their number had been struck, Mackintosh turned with a gasp of alarm toward the trapper, expecting to see him stagger to the ground; but all that he did was to change the course he had been pursuing, and commence reloading his rifle.

At the same instant the grasp of Miona upon the arm of her lover was spasmodically tightened, and, as he glanced inquiringly toward her, she pointed ahead and aspirated:

"Look!"

In the deepening gloom of the wood, Mackintosh saw the figure of a man with arms thrown up, falling backward. He was barely able to discern that it was that of an Indian, when their hurrying steps carried them out of his sight.

It was Nick Whiffles, then, who had fired the gun, and so truly was it aimed, that the unerring bullet drove the life from the body, ere he could give utterance to the death-yell, which almost invariably distinguishes the death of the Indian of this country.

"There are others near!" whispered Miona, as they sped away.

Deeper grew the gathering gloom, and the lovers could scarcely keep pace with the hurrying Nick Whiffles, who saw that all depended upon keeping out of sight of the Blackfeet until it was impossible for them to detect their trail, or to see them at any considerable distance in the wood.

Aware of the value of time, the red-skins were pushing their search with the utmost vigor, avoiding any outcry or signaling for fear of giving them the alarm.

The course of the trapper was as zigzag as the track of the lightning across the sky. He turned and doubled constantly, moving with great swiftness, until the athletic Mackintosh began to feel exhausted. They were barely able to see the lank form of Nick as he sped along, and he looked like some shadowy fugitive that they were vainly pursuing instead of their own leader.

All at once he came to a halt, and, turning upon them, demanded:

"Be you tired?"

Their panting breath answered his question without their saying any thing more.

"By mighty! we've had a sharp run for it!" he exclaimed, breathing somewhat more rapidly himself.

"But will it do to wait here?" asked the trembling Miona.

"Yes; they're off the track now, and by goin' ahead we'd be as likely to butt into 'em as not—while if we stay here we kin git a rest, that I rather think you folks need."

Need it they did, and were glad enough to get it, both sitting down upon the ground, while the old trapper folded his arms over the muzzle of his upright rifle, and seemed lost in reverie, while Calamity crouched at his feet, panting but as keenly vigilant as ever.

The woods were still—no sound betraying the proximity of their dreaded foes. Where they were, and what they were doing, could only be imagined, but there could be no doubt that they were on the alert somewhere, watchful for the first indication of the hiding-place of the fugitives.

Ten, fifteen minutes passed, and a faint, tremulous like whistle was heard, so soft and musical in its character, that Mackintosh could not tell whether it was in the air overhead, or beneath, or beside them.

A moment the same sound was repeated, apparently from the same spot, but Nick Whiffles read both signals aright. The first came from a point several hundred yards to the north, and the other almost the same distance west.

Had the latter been south instead of west, it would have shown that the whites were directly between the two parties giving utterance to them, and that they were closing down upon them; but, coming from the points mentioned, it proved that the Blackfeet had no certain means of guidance and were "feeling" for their prey.

Had Nick Whiffles been alone, he would have indulged his characteristic humor, by answering both of these signals, and equally misleading both. He had done so many a time when alone on the war-path, and he was strongly tempted to do so now.

It was only his regard for the safety of the two dear friends under his charge that induced him to forego this little piece of amusement, and to give his whole energies to keeping them out of danger.

The whites now made a slight change in their position, passing deeper into the wood, where the trees were more dense, but, as they immediately discovered, they were beside a sort of path, such as are made by animals in going to and fro to water. They fell into this path, without noticing it, until they had gone some distance, when Nick immediately left it.

"How long are we to wait here?" inquired Mackintosh.

"Till we git some idea of where the varmints are," replied the trapper. "We must git out of this condemned valley afore morning, or we never'll git out of it."

His plan was to wait where they were until they could advance with a tolerable certainty of not running into great danger.

Their movements and turnings up to this time had been guided solely with the purpose of keeping out of immediate danger only. When the red-skins were endeavoring to close about them, the utmost they could do was to keep slipping out of their grasp, until time could be gained for some plan of escape altogether.

The report of Nick Whiffles' rifle narrowed the struggle down to an exceedingly narrow point. The Blackfeet, scattered here and there through the wood, instantly converged toward the point, just in time to find their dead comrade, and to miss finding who had been the means of his taking off.

For several minutes succeeding the signals mentioned, nothing was heard, except the distant sound of the torrent and the rustle of the night-wind through the leaves overhead.

Then, all at once, the same whistle reached their ears, sounding so close that even Nick Whiffles himself started. Seemingly guided by fate, the Indians, without any certain knowledge themselves of the fact, were drawing nearer and nearer to the party each minute.

Nick stepped softly forward, and whispered to Miona to stand behind the tree closest to her, Mackintosh did the same, and then, as the trapper took his position, he whispered:

"Don't stir or speak till I give the word."

Calamity, at this juncture, gave utterance to an almost inaudible whine.

"Sh! pup!" said his master, and all was still again, the dog retreating to the denser cover of the wood.

This had scarcely taken place, when a slight rustling was heard, and the outlines

of a huge Indian were discerned, walking stealthily along the path. He seemed really a shadow, so silently did he move, and so swift were his footsteps that he was in view only a minute, when he slid into invisibility, and a second later another form came to view.

Nick Whiffles was the closest to the path, and he recognized this individual despite the darkness. The peculiar head-dress which he sported, marked him as the prime mover in this mischief. He was the young chieftain, Red Bear, seeking so determinedly for his bride, who was seeking with equal determination to get beyond his power.

Miona thought the beating of her heart would betray her, when this second form stopped almost opposite her.

Could it be that his acute ear heard the tumultuous throbbing of her heart? Had some slight rustling of her dress, inaudible to herself, caught his attention? Did the magnetic consciousness of her presence make itself known to him, as we are warned of the proximity of another person, when our senses fail to acquaint us with the fact?

She felt as if she would sink to the ground, when she made certain that the red-skin had halted so near her. It seemed to her that all was over, and despair took the place of hope that had been cheering her on.

Still she sustained herself from falling, and hardly allowed herself to breathe. Pressing her hand to her heart, as if to still its beating, she uttered her prayer that the danger might pass by her.

In this extremely delicate situation matters stood, when Red Bear, without moving a limb, gave out the same tremulous-like whistle that had already been heard several times, repeating it twice, with a slight interval.

Alarming as was the sound, it was cheering under the present circumstances, for it proved that Red Bear was really unaware of his neighbors, and Miona accepted it as such, scarcely able to suppress a sigh of relief.

The signal was answered by some one further up the path, and then Red Bear moved on, followed by another and another, until nine Indians had filed by, all moving so close that Nick Whiffles could have tripped any or all of them, by merely thrusting out his foot.

For several minutes after the last had passed none of the party moved. Then the trapper stepped out in the path, as a signal that the others might do the same. His action was speedily imitated, and they began moving forward again, taking a course directly opposite to that pursued by the Indians.

As there was a possibility, if not a probability of encountering some more of the red-skins, Calamity took up his old position of *avant courier* for his friends, maintaining such a relative position that he could easily give them warning in time for them to dart aside again from the path.

The lovers very naturally had lost their reckoning entirely, but Nick Whiffles knew that the path they were following led almost parallel to the two ridges between which they were placed, so that as long as it was followed they were really making little or no advancement toward their real destination.

But his present purpose, as it had been for some hours past, was to get beyond the immediate vicinity of the Indians, so as to obtain some freedom of movement. As the path afforded them the opportunity to move much more rapidly than through the broken wood, and at the same time was less liable to cause a betrayal of their presence by the noise of brushing limbs and breaking twigs, he availed himself, so far as was possible, of these advantages, and pressed forward with something like his old haste.

In the constant hurry and excitement of their situation, Ned Mackintosh scarcely found time to exchange a word with the trembling, affrighted Miona, who kept as close to him as the nature of the ground would permit; but now and then he managed to whisper a word of encouragement, and to press the little hand that rested so confidently in his own.

It was scarcely a time for sentimentality or for any expression of love, but the per which hung over all seemed to bring the two in closer union, and my hero felt that he would be glad to face any danger that would attest and prove his devotion to her.

The skill and sagacity of Nick Whiffles, favored by Providence, had sufficed to bring them through a labyrinth of peril, but they were yet in the gravest danger.

How much longer could a collision be postponed? Was there a possibility of reaching and passing over the ridge, without a deadly encounter with the Blackfeet? While they had hoped that there were no more than three or four in pursuit of them, there was now every reason to believe that there were over a dozen fully-armed and vigilant red-skins following them like bloodhounds.

Where would the morrow find them? Even if on the other side the slope, would their safety be any ways increased? Would they not be followed with the same unrelenting ferocity?

Such were the thoughts that were in the head of Ned Mackintosh, when a sudden stoppage of Nick Whiffles and his suppressed "sh!" warned them that they were in the presence of a new and startling danger!

(To be continued—commenced in No. 52.)

A WORD TO FATHERS.

MANY a father keeps his children so at a distance from him that they never get confidentially acquainted with him. They feel that he is a sort of monarch in the family. They feel no familiarity with him. They fear him and respect him, and even love him some, for children

NEW YORK, APRIL 1, 1871.

A. P. MORRIS, Jr.

Thus, one by one, the *Stars* gravitate to us. Our list already is, indeed, a bright Galaxy; but we have, in store, other accessions which will create renewed and exciting interest in

THE QUEEN OF THE WEEKLIES.

Foolscap Papers.

Robinson Crusoe.

The man, finding himself to be preserved, threw his arms around Robinson C. Chase and nearly smothered him with kisses and his breath. Robinson, then going to leeward of him, said: "You can't be Friday fried, eh? Well, well, you shall be Friday still;" so he took him into his service to help him to be lonesome, and a company to boot—sometimes—at a salary of old clothes per week. Robinson talked a great deal to him, and taught him to talk back (children are generally taught that in our blessed land), and to take a ha-

THE STREET ARABS.

There is plenty of room for Christian charity yet in New York; and, gentle reader, if you have a mite to bestow, before you send it away to purchase flannel shirts and blacking-brushes, or any other *useful* articles for the poor heathen who roam the South Sea Islands, just think for a moment of the hundreds of poor boys who are striving to get an honest living in the streets of Gotham. True charity begins at home. Let us assist our own heathen, the ragged and independent "Street Arabs," before we send our alms away to foreign lands.

MONEY.

Yet, if it wasn't for money, what should we do—how get along at all? It's hard to have in your pocket when you attend charity fairs, and the fair ladies fairly beseech you to take a chance in some lotto or raffle. It's useful when there's a second of youngsters whose boots are out of repair and not an unhandy thing to be in possession of.

THE PRODIGAL HEARD FROM

THE PRODIGAL HEARD FROM

I knew not whether to receive them with open arms, or punish him for his matrimonial adventure. His wife has proved an additional attraction to our show, and she

THE SAND-PAPER CURE

HE CURES RHEUMATISM.
Chicago, Feb 10th 1871

"Montreal, Jan. 10, 1871.
"TO THE PUBLIC:
"At twenty years of age I was entitled

"Buffalo, Jan 4, 1871.

"Yours, etc., A. WHOPPER."

HE SAND-PAPERS DOWN A TUMOR.
 "New York, March 1st, 1875"

"TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:
"Ten years ago a tumor began growing

WATER CURES NOWHERE. HOW THE PO
OF PHILADELPHIA ARE KEPT IN FIREWO
"Philadelphia, Feb. 5, 1871

"TO THE PUBLIC:
"All the Water cure establishments in the vicinity have been compelled to close on account of Dr. Griffith's wonderful success."

"The poor of the city are kept in firewood this winter by a distribution of the crutches and canes which Dr. Gritty's patients have been enabled to throw aside. The sand-paper crutch is destined to supersede all other forms of pro-

HE CURES CONSUMPTION.

"Girard, Pa., March 4, 1877.
"I have had consumption since I was a boy
and not much else. For a period of over forty
years I have been failing every day. I got tired

enough to be used for a paper-cutter, and raised a great deal. The doctors stuck to me so long as I could raise any money; when I ceased to make a pie payment they dropped me. Fortunately I heard of Dr. Gritty. Went to see him. He sand-papered my chest, also my trunk and a few small pieces of baggage. I began to mend. He kept on sand-papering, and now I can come up from fifty-six pounds to two hundred and fifty-six, and get my living by having rocks broken on my chest with a sledge hammer in Dan Rice's Circus.

Readers and Contributors.

"Brightest luminary in the Galaxy of Weeklies" is what Miss L. M. R. says of the SATURDAY JOURNAL. Thank you, Miss. Very unlike some other of our "popular" weeklies, we shine by no reflected splendor.

Miss M. A. B. The MS. referred to we could not use. It was cast aside, we believe, for want of stamps for its return. If authors want MSS. returned there is but one course to pursue: follow our

E. P. D. We can not tell you why Alice King's Joke was unavailable. It would take one editor's entire time if he attempted to "give reasons." Authors must not ask such services.—Sketch, "How the Bank was Saved" may answer for some of the city papers. Send it to the *Leader, Citizen, Dispatch* or *Advertiser*.
 Yours truly,
 J. M. G. *Secretary of MS.*

SANCTUM wishes to know if Captain Mayne Reid's new story, "The Mustangers," will soon appear in the SATURDAY JOURNAL; also, if the "Child Wife" was the novel of his published by Sheldon; if the

Captain is still writing for the SATURDAY JOURNAL
 and if bad health caused his return to England.
 We shall soon delight the readers of the SATURDAY
 JOURNAL with "The Mustangers; a tale of the
 Cross Timbers," undoubtedly one of the best novels
 that the brilliant Captain has ever written.
 "The Child Wife" was published in Shadow. It is said
 to be a true story, founded on events that occurred
 in the Captain's own life. The Captain did see
 England for the benefit of his health. He will con-
 tinue to contribute to the SATURDAY JOURNAL.

EDITH writes: "Please tell me who Agile Penne is?" Certainly, always delighted to oblige our faithful correspondents, Agile Penne is a gentleman who stands, without a question, at the head of all the sketch writers of America. He is a New Yorker, a retiring in his disposition, and his sketches are brilliant. A dreamer, who lives in an ideal world of his own creation.

C. A. N. as: "Is it the duty of a gentleman to assist a lady in getting on or off a street-car?" Most assuredly, we answer. It does not matter whether the lady be an intimate friend or a perfect stranger. It is the gentleman's duty to offer his assistance. The lady ought to accept of it, for some reason or other. Suppose the car should start suddenly as is often the case, the arm of the gentleman might save the lady from a fall, which would be very disagreeable to say the least. It is such little acts of courtesy that distinguish the true gentleman. Courtesy—thoughtfulness for another's comfort—is the oil that causes the wheels of civilized life to run.

H. E. P. We can furnish the back numbers of the SATURDAY JOURNAL to paper No. 35. The thirty-four numbers will cost \$1.70.

O. K. inquires if the SATURDAY JOURNAL will print a revolutionary story in its columns. Yes. One of the ablest authors in America is engaged upon a story of the days of '76, which will be given to the world through the medium of the Star Journal. Our

readers may rest assured that there is no American subject, on which a good serial can be written, that will be neglected by the two score or more of able writers on the staff of the Journal. This revolutionary story will be as far superior to the serials on the subject that have been published, as the famous Wolf Demon was to the hackneyed Indian stories of the day. The SATURDAY JOURNAL will have nothing but the best.

STEWART writes: "Was there ever a display of fireworks in the City Hall Park, or any other park in this city (New York,) in honor of George Washington's birthday? If so, please give the date of the year." Yes. In the City Hall Park 1866.

A TROJAN writes: "I am a clerk receiving a salary of \$1,000 per year. I am on very intimate terms with two young ladies. I don't know exactly which one of the two I like best. In fact, I do not really think that I care any more for one than I do for the other. I feel sure that either of them would make me a good wife and that I could be happy with either. One is a poor girl, the daughter of a mechanic. She is an industrious, hard-working

girl. She is employed in a collar manufactory. The other is a daughter of my employer—and he is quite wealthy—but she has not been brought up to work and is not very strong. Now, which one of the two would you advise me to marry? Perhaps it is somewhat egotistical of me to say so, but I feel sure that

an offer from me would be accepted by either one of the ladies, I would be obliged to advise him to find out which one of the ladies he really does care for, before he debates upon the respective merits of either. We are sadly attached to each other, and I am sure that neither of us does not really love either one of the two women enough to bind himself for life to her. Marriage is a very serious affair, and I am sure that neither of us would ever wish to get into and very hard to get out of. You feel sure that your offer would be accepted by either of the ladies, but you haven't tried to get married before, and I am sure that you would refuse you. Such an event is not impossible! Now we say, earnestly and candidly, find out which one you do love, then marry that one, no matter how poor he be, and then you will be happy for the rest of your life, and you will not regret for you, not your head. If you find that you like the rich and not over-strong girl, marry her; you will be wise and happy. If you find that you like her, if you love the poor and robust maiden, make her your wife. Her love will serve you on rather up the worldly goods that make life comfortable. Above all, be sure that you do love the one you marry.

MILLIE writes: "I live in a small place a few miles from New York, and come into the city twice a week to take my music lesson. The last time I came into the city, there was a young gentleman sitting in the seat behind me in the car; happening to turn round once I caught his eyes fixed upon me. He was nicely dressed and seemed like a gentleman and was very nice-looking, too. As I looked out of the car window, I could see that he was watching me. Presently he wrote on a card and put it over on my seat. He wrote to know if he might occupy the vacant seat by my side. I know it was very

foolish, but I wrote on the card that as the seat was unoccupied, of course, I had no objections to his taking it. So he came and sat by my side all the way in to the city. Of course, we talked together and he asked permission to correspond with me and I promised that I would answer him if he wrote. He did write and I wrote in reply. My parents do not know of it, and I begin to think that I am doing wrong. Please tell me.⁵⁾ You have acted very foolishly.

ishly. According to your own statement, you know nothing of this young man. His character may be very bad. You have written him a letter; probably signed your full name to it. Can you tell what he will make of that letter? No. If you really feel that the young man is a gentleman, one that you

would be pleased to acknowledge as a friend, are willing to take some trouble to secure his friendship, tell him to call upon you and introduce him to your parents. If his character is good he can have no objections to such a course. If he does not, tell your parents he is not a friend of yours. More young girls are led to the path of evil by foolishly corresponding with strange men than to the world dreams of. You have done *wrong*. Tell your parents all, ask their forgiveness, and in the future never act without their knowledge and full consent.

Q Unanswered questions on hand roll appear next week.

GO FORTH, BROWN HANDS!

BY A. A. HOPKINS.

Brown hands, go forth to your labor!
The snow from the grass is gone;
The bluebird pipes to its neighbor,
At opening of the dawn;
The earth-life silently hidden
In sleep that is twin of death,
Awakes from its rest unbidden,
With warmth in its rising breath!

Go forth, brown hands, to your duty!
Humanity calls to-day;
For life all brimming with beauty,
Your generous tribute pay!
The needs of a world are pressing;
The key to supplies you hold;
The plow is the people's blessing—
The wealth of the soil unfolds!

Brown hands, go forth on your mission!
Brown hands are the nation's hope;
They better the world's condition
As bravely with earth they cope.
They scatter their hard won earnings
Far over all seas and lands,
And Peace hath its full returnings
In trust in the strong brown hands!

Strange Stories.

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH.
A TALE OF FLORIDA.

BY AGILE PENNE.

THE last rays of the fast-dying sun gleamed down upon the tree-tops and bathed the savanna with a soft flood of golden light. They danced in countless ripples on the bosom of the dark river that was rolling on so slowly to the ocean.

Florida—land of flowers; where the breath of heaven smells sweetly and the birds sing ever amid the fragrant blossoms of the magnolia and the jessamine.

The sunbeams fell not only on the great virgin forest, the flower-studded savanna, and on the somber river with its ceaseless flow, but on human forms.

In a little, green glade, close by the bank of the river, carelessly clustered around a blazing fire, were a group of hardy soldiers—stout men-at-arms were they—laced in steel.

Many a time had they pressed on to victory under the proud banner of haughty Spain. And now under the lead of the daring soldier, Ponce de Leon, they sought amid the flowery wilds of Florida, not glory, but gold and eternal youth.

And among the steel-clad and bearded soldiers stood an Indian chief—a stalwart savage—decked in the forest garb of deer-skin. He was the guide.

"By the Virgin!" cried De Leon, with an impatient accent, "how much further have we to go, chief, ere we reach the Fountain of Youth by the river with golden sands?"

"Two sleeps," replied the Indian. "You are not deceiving us?"

"The tongue of the White Heron is not forked; he can not lie to his pale-face brother," said the Appalachee chief, calmly.

An expression of doubt passed rapidly across the bronzed face of the Spaniard, but he held his tongue and kept his suspicions locked in his heart.

As he turned his face from the Indian, as if he feared that the keen-eyed savage might read his thoughts, his glance fell upon one of his soldiers, who, apart from the rest, stood leaning upon his musket, with an expression of gloom upon his face.

The soldier was called Lope de Garcia; a young and handsome fellow, with his dark eyes and hair and his resolute but intelligent features—young, handsome, yet a settled melancholy seemed ever on his soul.

"Pedro," said De Leon, turning to his lieutenant, a scarred and veteran soldier, who reclined carelessly on the sword by his side, "a question to you, comrade, mine. Why is it that Lope de Garcia never smiles?"

A young and handsome blade, the blood should leap lightly in his veins, yet he seems more fitted for a cowed monk than for aught else, though brave to rashness and a soldier tried."

"The boy and hard fortune have gone hand in hand," replied the old soldier. "His family is one of the richest and noblest in Spain, and he is the only son. Some three years ago he met in Madrid a young and lovely girl. He loved her at first sight, and she returned the passion even before they had spoken a word together. Judge of the lovers' dismay when they discovered that their fathers were deadly enemies. They planned a secret marriage, fled together, but the flight was discovered; they were followed, the girl torn from her lover's arms, and in a convent was forced, by her parents, to take the veil and vow that made her the bride of heaven. Three months after the solemn ceremony that snatched the young life from the gay and beautiful world, and gave it to the cloister's gloom, she died. Since that time, Lope de Garcia has sought for death. He seeks forgetfulness in the grave."

"Yet he lives?"

"Yes; he seems to bear a charmed life; lead and steel alike spare him. Now you know why he never smiles or mingles in the merry song or jest that rings around the camp-fire."

Lope de Garcia lifted up his head, saw his captain's eyes fastened upon him, and approached.

"Captain, have I your permission to try for game in yonder wood?" he asked, pointing up the river.

De Leon bowed assent. Lope left the savanna and plunged into the thicket.

A half an hour or so he walked on; then he came to an opening in the wood where the savanna stretched down to the bank of the stream.

In the covert of the underwood the young soldier concealed himself. He thought that, possibly, a deer might approach the water to drink.

Ten minutes had the soldier lain in ambush, when a light step broke on the stillness of the savanna and forest. A young Indian girl, attired in deer-skin, gayly fringed and feathered, approached the stream.

The soldier could hardly believe the evidence of his senses; the savage maid was the perfect image of the Spanish girl he had loved and lost!

For the first time for many a long month, a smile came over the features of the careworn soldier.

The girl stooped to lave her hand in the water.

An angry growl caused her to start with fear.

Over her head, crouched on a spreading branch, was a huge panther.

His eyes glared like balls of fire; certain death for the helpless girl lurked in those jaws of steel.

The huge tail of the forest king lashed the air. He was preparing for the spring which would carry death in its bound.

Then the smoke of a musket curled on the air, and an ounce-ball plowed its way through the brain of the beast. With a howl of agony, the panther—lord of the forest—dropped to the earth, lifeless.

The eye of the Spaniard had been sure, his hand quick. He stepped from his leafy covert. The girl did not fly, but bounded to him and knelt in homage at his feet.

But for the color of her skin, which had been reddened by the warm kiss of the sun-god—prolonged through many ages—the soldier would have sworn that he looked again upon the Spanish maid whose loss he mourned.

"Tehula owes her life to the white chief!" cried the girl.

With wondering eyes, awed by the strange likeness, Lope raised the girl from the ground.

"Where are your brothers?" asked the forest-maid.

"How did you know that I had brothers?" said the Spaniard, in astonishment.

"They came across the great lake in a big canoe; they seek some wonderful spring whose sands are yellow, and with them is the White Heron, an Appalachee chief," replied the girl, with a smile.

"Yes, you speak truth; do you know where the Fountain of Youth is?" asked the Spaniard, eagerly.

With a sad smile, the girl pointed to the sky.

"I do not understand," Lope said.

"In the spirit-land above can we find Eternal Youth. The white-skins are betrayed. There is no spring with yellow sands in the flower-land. The White Heron leads the pale-faces further and further from the great salt lake that he may give them into the hands of his red brothers."

"But, why do you betray your nation?" the Spaniard asked.

"Tehula is not a daughter of the Appalachee. She was stolen when a child from her tribe far beyond the great yellow river, there," and she pointed to the west. The pale-face has saved the life of Tehula; in turn, she will save him from the red braves. Hush!" she cried, suddenly, as she bent in a listening attitude. "Danger is near; farewell; return to your brothers and tell them that the White Heron is a traitor!"

Then, light as a bird, the girl bounded into the wood and disappeared.

The Spaniard listened, but could hear no

rapier thrust through his heart, given by Ponce de Leon's hand, lay the White Heron.

The girl had seen the capture of Lope, hastened to the Spanish camp, denounced the traitor, and led the soldiers to the rescue of their brother.

After a long and weary march, and many a desperate fight with the red chiefs, the Spaniards reached their ship again.

The Fountain of Youth that fed the river of golden sands was never seen by mortal eyes, but in the search for it in the flower-land, Lope de Garcia won a treasure which not all the gold in the world could purchase—the pure and passionate love of the Indian maid. In her arms, de Garcia learned to forget the secret that the cloisters hid.

The Old Valise.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH.

FIRE! fire! fire!

Theodore Darnley sprang from his couch and threw up the sash. A bright light fell upon the lawn beneath his chamber, and a score of frightened servants were calling upon him to escape ere the fiery demon hemmed him in and rendered escape impossible.

He obeyed. Springing from the window, he dashed down the steep stairs and joined the crowd in the yard. Then he looked up at the beautiful mansion, the pride of his ancestors and the joy of his own heart. It was doomed to destruction. Already the flames were devouring the elaborately-molded cornices, and leaping from the windows like so many red demons.

Suddenly the young lord of Darnley dashed forward with a strange cry, and disappeared within the burning building!

The servants could not comprehend their master's mad action, and stared into each other's pale faces.

"He's gone forever!" at last ejaculated the old butler. "He's the last of his race, you know, and perhaps he is aware of the fact that Darnley Farm is heavily mortgaged, and has concluded to perish in the flames. Poor fellow! We'll find his bones to-morrow, and give them Christian burial."

While the old man was speaking, Theodore Darnley was rushing toward his room. He reached it and drew an old brass-bound trunk from beneath his couch. It took but little strength to force the worm-eaten lid, and the next moment he seized an ancient

and he will not have the audacity to claim Ethelda's hand in marriage in his present condition. He can never regain that which he has lost. Now I will enter upon the conquest of a woman's heart. Thank God, Beechwood is not mortgaged, though it is fast going to rack and ruin. True, I have but little ready money; but when I possess Ethelda's hand I will handle the old earl's bank-notes, and re-win those I lost over the green cloth."

And, with an unquenching glance of triumph at the still-burning mansion, the titled profligate turned on his heel and disappeared.

"Ethelda, I have ascertained the cause of the vivid light you saw from your chamber casement last night."

Thus spoke Sir Walter Johnson as he entered his rich parlor, the morning following the destruction of Darnley mansion.

Ethelda looked up inquiringly, but did not speak.

"Lincoln, the young lord of Beechwood, passed the court a short while ago, and informed me that Darnley mansion is in ruins. Theodore took his departure during the conflagration, and his present whereabouts are not known."

As the earl paused, a scarcely perceptible pallor flitted across Ethelda's face, leaving it as serene as before.

It was plain that the tidings were wholly unexpected, and had greatly shocked her.

"And his lordship further informed me," continued the earl, "of something of which I was ignorant. I refer to Theodore's pecuniary affairs. The late conflagration has transformed him into a beggar."

"A beggar?" echoed Ethelda.

"Yes; Darnley Farm was heavily mortgaged, and it must now pass into strangers' hands. Daughter, I can but condemn the ruined lord for keeping from me the state of his finances, which I can not fully understand. His grandfather was reputed a modern Cæsar; but, judging from the present state of affairs, such tales must have been without foundation. Ethelda, did he ever mention to you that his estate was within the grasp of the London bankers?"

"He did, father."

"Then, why did he withhold the fact from me?"

"This day he intended to ask of you my hand in marriage, and reveal all. But, now, alas! he will never cross our threshold again."

"May Heaven keep him forever absent from Johnson Hall!" cried the father. "Let



THE OLD VALISE.

sound except the whisper of the leaves stirred by the balmy breeze.

He turned to retrace his steps. Hardly had he entered the wood when a score of dark forms sprang upon him. Headlong he was borne to the earth. He was a prisoner in the hands of the red warriors.

They tied his wrists with stout thongs of deer-skin, and then bore him to their camp, a league or so from the river.

Short was the council of the Appalachee chiefs, and speedy the sentence.

Lope de Garcia was to die at the torture stake.

The moon chased the dark clouds away, and poured down a flood of silvery light upon the little savanna.

A stake was planted in the soft loam, amid the grass and flowers; and to it they tied the helpless soldier. At his feet a heap of dried sticks, his funeral pyre.

Coldly and silently the dauntless Spaniard gazed upon his foes.

Around him danced the red chiefs, in savage glee. Taunt and gibe they flung at the pale-face, but he answered not.

Then the fire was lit, and the smoke curled upward around the prisoner's head. The soldier had sought the laurel wreath, and had won, instead, the smoke crown of death.

He closed his eyes to meet his fate. Two faces were before him—one, the pale Spaniard girl who had died for love of him amid a cloister's gloom; the other, the sun-kissed features of the forest-maid.

The flames leaped upward and shone upon the polished corselet of the soldier. He felt their hot breath and knew that death was nigh.

A murmured prayer to the Virgin Mother came from his resolute lips.

Then, on the soft breeze, redolent with the perfume of the wild flowers, rang the musket-shots, and the war-cry of old Spain, "Santiago and set on!"

The rush of steel-laced men followed. The long Spanish rapiers gleamed in the moonbeams, and soon wept red drops of savage blood.

The red chiefs gave way before the charge of the fiery sons of Spain.

In the vastness of the thicket they sought refuge from steel and fire.

Soft hands cut the cords that bound the young soldier; soft arms entwined themselves about his neck, and on his lips he felt the warm pressure of a woman's loving kiss.

Tehula, the Indian maid, had saved the man she loved.

In the savanna by the river, with a gory

and moldy valise which lay at the bottom of the old receptacle, and sprang toward the door. A dense volume of smoke assailed him, but he bravely fought through it and gained the stair, which was wrapped in flames. He gazed into the fiery gulf a full minute ere he nerved himself for desperate action, and began the perilous descent.

The burning structure oscillated and creaked terribly beneath his weight; but he gained the bottom of the stair as it fell with a crash that sent a chill to the hearts of the superstitious domestics in the yard. His greatest peril was now over. To rush through the corridor into the great entry which led to the lawn was but the work of a moment, which he accomplished.

His reappearance was greeted with many demonstrations of joy by the servants, who had given him up as lost, and were extolling his virtues which shone forth like pale stars. He answered all questions save those touching the old valise and its contents. But one of the servants, and he a very old man whose steps trembled upon the boundary of a century, was aware of its existence before the present hour. He glanced from the old object to his master's face with a meaning smile, but kept his own counsel.

The fire, the work of an incendiary, raged for several hours before the huge timbers yielded, and fell in with a deafening crash. Then Theodore turned and walked away, hugging the valise to his bosom. He was penniless now. Darnley Farm, the birth and death-place of his ancestors for a century, would fall into the clutches of merciless creditors; and he would possess no memento of the dear old spot save the valise, of whose contents even he himself was ignorant.

While the flames were licking up the combustible portion of Theodore Darnley's ancestral halls, the incendiary mounted to the summit of a hill which overlooked the awful scene.

He was a man in the noon of life, respectably clad, and very prepossessing; but around his lips there lurked a smile which proclaimed him the possessor of a disposition coveted by none.

"My plans have thus far worked like a charm," he said aloud, as a volume of heavenward-shooting sparks told the fate of the gigantic roof. "Now Sir Walter will drive him from beneath his roof, and the coast will be clear to me. He is literally a beggar now. I have been cognizant of his financial ruin for several months, and to-night I burned him out to insure complete success. He knows how Sir Walter detests ruined nobles,

him but have the audacity to demand your hand in marriage in his present degraded condition, and I will eject him from the castle at the point of my good sword. Ethelda, you loved him?"

"I did, and love him still."

"Pluck that affection from your heart, and throw it far from you; for not until the stars turn to bloody spheres, and the sun deserts the firmament, shall you become the wife of the beggar, Theodore Darnley."

Ethelda was about to reply to her parent's outburst of passion, when a servant opened the door and announced:

"Theodore, Lord of Darnley."

A cloud of anger darkened the knight's features, as he said, with a sneer:

"Theodore, lord of beggars! Moab, admit him. Now," to his daughter, "we will hear the dog's whine."

With his accustomed step, Theodore entered the parlor, bearing the old valise, upon which Sir Walter riveted his gaze.

With a few sentences he described the burning of Darnley mansion, and the deplorable state of affairs circumstances had thrown around him.

"I have nothing left save this old valise," he said, in confusion, placing the moldy relic of bygone ages upon a chair. "It has not been opened for fifty-six years, and I, therefore, am as ignorant of its contents as yourselves. Upon his death-bed my grandfather placed it in the hands of a true attendant, saying: 'I charge you keep this for my son's son. Place it in his hands upon his twenty-fourth birthday, and let it be opened in the presence of his bride and her father, or, they who are to become such.' This day is my twenty-fourth birthday; and I request you, Sir Walter, to open the valise with your own hands."

Wondering what the old valise could contain, Sir Walter drew his sword and approached the chair. Standing side by side, Ethelda and her lover bestowed intense curiosity upon his movements.

It took but a short time for the knight's sword to sever the straps that engirdled the valise, when it suddenly expanded, and lo! a shower of diamonds fell to the floor!

The uttered ejaculations of astonishment, and Sir Walter called to mind the stories, still current, of the old lord's wealth. The diamonds were carefully collected. The minor portion of them would purchase the finest estate in the realm.

Of course Sir Walter could not now deny Theodore Ethelda's hand, and in due time the marriage was celebrated with great éclat. Lord Lincoln of Beechwood was so char-

grined at the failure of his plans that he plunged deeper than ever into dissipation, and ended his wicked life in the midst of a bacchanalian revel.

Oath-Bound:

OR,

THE MASKED BRIDE.

BY MRS. MARY REED CROWELL,

AUTHOR OF "SHADOWED HEART," "SCARLET CREST," ETC.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANOTHER DAY.

THE elegant breakfast service on Mrs. Temple's table was glittering in the broad band of sunlight that lay upon it, that frosty October morning; and with the genial warmth from the partly opened register around them, the sociable household were chatting gayly.

"You spirited yourself away so suddenly last night that I had no opportunity for a quiet cigar. Were you at the theater, Haigite, or out promenading? You missed a treat if you did not hear Nilsson."

Bertrand was eating his egg thoughtfully when Clifford addressed him; he started a little in surprise, and Gussie laughed.

"I do declare, Bertie, I shall make Crystal laugh heartily when we get home, by telling her of all these abstracted fits of yours."

He made an effort to join in the little ripple of laughter that went round.

"Such devotion does not often exist, even when the bridal day wants but a few weeks of its birth. I pride myself that my son is a model of constancy."

Mrs. Haigite looked proudly at her handsome boy. Little did she know how her words stabbed him!

"Apropos of how and where you spent your evening last night, Haigite. I want you to accompany me this afternoon to call on a very particular lady friend of mine. This morning we'll go to—"

"I will gladly be at your service after lunch, but before I am particularly engaged. Several property agents to look after, and some taxes to have settled."

"Oh, then, I'll meet you at Delmonico's—say two o'clock."

Lurline sat, with cold hands and hot cheeks, wondering who that lady friend of Temple's was.

As the gentleman went out, she detained Bertrand, to whom her agitation plainly revealed her anxiety.

"Bertie, there, please find if he's engaged to her."

He pressed her hand, and while he might have told her then and there that Clifford was betrothed to Mrs. St. Havens, he avoided giving her the pain he knew it must cause her.

At the front entrance they parted; Lurline to brood in suspicion, Clifford to attend to his legitimate business, and Bertrand to call a carriage and drive straight to Lexington avenue.

Undine met him at the door, more charming, if that were possible, than ever.

She had attired herself in a garnet silk carriage-dress, with a costly velvet sacque, cut low across the front, where she wore a fine lace corsage. A round hat, of garnet velvet, with a long, floating bill of Paradise; garnet kids, and heavy Etruscan gold ornaments.

That was Undine Del Rose, Mrs. St. Havens' charity dependent!

All that long ride, she wove her chains more tightly about him; his senses were intoxicated by her bewildering beauty, and when they alighted, just in time for Bertrand to meet Temple at the appointed hour, he had decided to offer her his heart, hand and fortune before the night closed upon them.

"You'll reserve to-night for me, Undine? I want to see you particularly. You can guess what I wish to say, my beautiful one, but I will not tell it to you until I see you at nine, this evening."

"Of course you must come. Then au revoir till then."

She waived him a kiss, then watched him away.

"It's a dangerous game; but I've begun it and I'll end it, somehow." If Clifford Temple tells him of our engagement—"

Her flashing eyes answered her threat.

"I see no reason why either should mention me to the other. If they should, I will elect Bertrand Haigite for my choice, and Clifford Temple may do his worst."

She was thinking these thoughts as she removed her costly wrappings.

"Perhaps Mrs. St. Havens is a monomaniac on certain subjects; but sane or insane, there is no earthly reason why I should not marry Bertrand Haigite if I want to. Poor fellow! he has forgotten that I told him, in that first interview, that he never could marry. Well, he shall not, unless I am the bride!"

She suffered a glad, triumphant light to shine in her eyes; and as she stood smiling at her proud reflection, she little dreamed that the path, so easy to tread now, that opened so luckily before, was so soon to close upon her, leaving her to complete the journey as best she might.

"Now, Haigite, to see my betrothed." Clifford announced their destination as the brougham came to the door.

"Betrothed? You are as fortunate as myself then."

"Perhaps. You see, Bertrand, I am not sure of the welcome I shall receive. My lady-love and I parted not the best of friends."

Bertrand laughed, and thought of his parting with his beloved, though not yet a betrothed.

"These lovers' tiffs are mere bagatelles. Depend upon it, the fair one will be all smiles."

Bertrand smiled to himself as the carriage turned into Lexington avenue, and wondered what Undine would say to see him come with Clifford Temple to call on Mrs. St. Havens.

As they alighted, Clifford turned to him. "Be prepared for the most wondrous revelation of beauty you ever beheld."

"I have heard of the lady's fair face before to-day. But I fear she is from home."

"I think not. I just caught a glimpse of her as we ascended the steps."

Together they entered the same apartment. Bertrand had so lately left, and that he was so soon again to visit, to ask Undine to become his wife.

He awaited with feverish impatience Mrs. St. Havens' appearance, hoping his charmer would be with her. But, to his surprise, Undine entered alone.

He glanced at her, and at sight of her could, with difficulty, repress a cry.

He rose and took her hand.

"Miss Del Rose, you are pale and agitated. Has any thing occurred to distress you?"

She stole a tender, wistful glance at him before she replied.

"Nothing, thank you, Mr. Haighte. Mr. Temple, you will not find Mrs. St. Havens at home."

She changed her voice to one of extreme frigidity as she addressed her lover.

He bowed gallantly.

"I am not desirous of seeing Mrs. St. Havens. I came to present my friend, Mr. Haighte, to my fiancée, but I perceive he has the pleasure of her acquaintance."

A hot flame rose to Bertrand's face.

"Miss Del Rose betrothed to you, Temple? I understood you were interested in the lady of the house."

He looked from Undine, who was shivering inwardly, wondering how this was to end, but outwardly calm and dignified, so perfect was her command of herself, to Clifford, who, with a smile on his lips and in his eyes seemed to enjoy the situation.

"You are mistaken, Mr. Temple, in representing me as engaged to you, when you know I never cared for you. Mr. Haighte, be so kind as to close the register? the room is too warm."

Bertrand's back was toward them a moment as he obeyed her request; and then she looked at Temple. One of those lightning glances that told him to beware how he thwarted her, that expressed the defiance she felt—the love she entertained for Bertrand.

He smiled calmly back at her flushing, passionate cheeks, and then Haighte joined them again.

He seemed to have undergone a complete revolution of feeling since he entered the house; when he stopped across the threshold it had been in the full flush of his impulsive passion for the siren who had lured him, first from happiness with Crystel Roscoe, and now from Crystel without happiness.

Of a sudden, the charm was broken, and his head grew confused and giddy as one awaking from some frightfully-entrancing dream; and a long, cold thrill that quivered over him, as he drew a relieved breath, told him the spell was broken, while as by magic, Crystel's fine, sweet face rose before him.

The contrast served to complete the thankfulness of his escape, and when he turned his face toward Undine again, it was fairly radiant with the new-born thoughts. It was as if after the weakness following a consuming fever he had grown strong again.

"I am grieved if there has arisen any misunderstanding between Miss Del Rose and Mr. Temple. I fear I am *de trop*. I beg you both will permit me to retire, while you amicably restore each other to favor."

Undine's bright eyes had watched every motion of his lips, while Temple was watching her. There was no love in his glances, and had Mrs. St. Havens seen him, she would have realized all she strove to explain to Undine.

"You are not intruding, sir. And since Mr. Temple chooses to utter language more elegant than truthful, permit me to remark, more forcibly than courteous, that your society is preferable to Mr. Temple's."

Her eyes flashed back their dark defiance at Clifford, who bowed as she concluded.

"Then I will at once retire. Perhaps we will see you at dinner, Haighte?"

He turned to Bertrand.

"I also must bid Miss Del Rose adieu, as I leave the city in an hour or so for The Towers."

A sudden dusky hue crept over her face, but she restrained the words that were forming on her lips.

"He dare not go without keeping his appointment," she thought; and secure in that thought, she bade the gentlemen adieu, with a frosty bow to Temple, and a warm passionate glance at Bertrand. At the window she watched them down, her countenance, now that there were no watchful eyes upon her, displaying all the wild workings of a heart fired by an equally violent love and hate.

"How dare he do it! The cowardly villain, to bring him here, and then to my face tell me of it! But, you are thwarted, Clifford Temple! he whom I love I have blinded; he will be deaf to your stories—your truths, I may say when no one hears. Do your very worst, sir! I defy you! and not all the powers of earth or air shall deter me from being the bride of Bertrand Haighte!"

She clenched her fist after the retreating form of Temple.

"He'll come to-night, and when he asks me to be his bride I'll tell him yes—that old family record need not be regarded in our case; that in marrying me, the ban is removed! And then I will lead him to name an early day; and then, that for Clifford Temple, Crystel Roscoe, or Mrs. St. Havens!"

She snapped her pretty fingers, and then went down to dinner.

CHAPTER IX. GLORIOUS LIGHT.

THAT night, while Undine Del Rose sat waiting for her lover, he and his mother, with Lurline and Gussie, were gathered around their dining-table at The Towers, chatting over the incidents of the journey.

Lurline's face was resplendent with the joy that sat upon it, for Clifford Temple had requested permission to visit her in the succeeding week; and Bertrand had told her what Clifford had told him as they left Undine, that, although he had been engaged to Miss Del Rose, she had dissolved it by her actions, and he should formally return her freedom at the earliest possible moment.

Bertrand seemed more joyous than he had been for several days; one reason was, the removal of the witchery that he was unable to escape; another, and better reason, was, he had decided, after mature deliberation, to follow Hellice Roscoe's advice, and lay before his mother the entire story.

If the tradition were true, the curse that ensued for acquainting the females of the Haightes with the family legend, then his mother would never live to see the sun rise again; instant vengeance would seize the recipient of the secret.

Bertrand was somewhat superstitious; he dearly loved his proud lady mother, and the struggle was a bitter one.

On the other side was Hellice's advice; the possibility of a greater joy—the restoration of Crystel, whom he loved with penitential affection, after his brief infatuation for Undine—than he dared imagine.

The sisters had gone for a short promenade on the dusky lawn; Mrs. Haighte was busy with some fine linen she was embroidering, and Bertrand, away back among the shadows, took this for his opportunity.

"Mother," he said, suddenly, "do you believe in old traditional legends that have been handed down from father to son for several generations?"

"I must confess I am skeptical on that point. Some persons, I am aware, religiously cling to family superstitions; but it seems to me, in these enlightened days, they should be treated as they deserve, with contempt."

She little knew the ecstasy those words awoke in his breast; he raised himself from the gay silken cushion, and strove to speak indifferently, while his heart was throbbing so madly.

"I heard, once, of one of these old legends, that was sacredly preserved by the sons of the family, and as religiously kept from the daughters and wives, on pain of sudden and immediate death."

Mrs. Haighte laughed; a mellow natural melody that seemed to send a thrill of unutterable bliss through Bertrand's veins.

"Well, my boy, being as I am a liver in this wonderful nineteenth century, I would not feel the least uneasiness if I were a member of that romantic family, and by accident discovered it."

Bertrand sprang from his sofa in excited haste.

"Bless you, mother mine, for those words. Then you will listen while I tell you my story?"

In an instant she grew grave, and ceased her work.

"If you are in trouble, or in joy, my son, I am your mother, who would die to help you."

Bertrand pressed a loving kiss on her forehead.

"Then let me tell you."

He began at the beginning, telling her of Undine's visit to Edenwilde; of the cabalistic words that Crystel was to use as a test; how he had recognized them as being the same as recorded in the mysterious letter; how Crystel and he had been sundered thereby; how Undine had possession of the old family ring, and so on, until she was in full possession of all the facts.

"Now, mother, you are doomed, if the tradition be true."

Mrs. Haighte laughed assuringly.

"I think I will pour your coffee as usual, to-morrow morning, my dear son. I am somewhat surprised, I must admit, that this story is so new to me. Surely I would have heard of it before."

"No," he said, eagerly. "But then you remember that it has been guarded as a most profound secret."

She looked seriously at Bertrand.

"You really place confidence in this affair of the solemnly-mysterious letter and its charge?"

Bertrand could not help blushing under that earnest, questioning, half-sarcastic gaze.

"I am fain to admit that I do. Else why permit this painful state of affairs between Crystel and I?"

"True. I am sorry for what you have suffered, and my poor Crystel, who believes you an oracle. I am pleased that that noble-minded Hellice takes so sensible a view of it, while I am free to confess, Bertrand, that I am a little mortified that you, a Haighte, are so easily impressed by a trumped-up story of a girl with pretty eyes."

Bertrand could not say a word in his defense; then, after a brief silence, he seemed suddenly to have solved a puzzling point.

"But the letter, mother, subscribed by all the Haightes, since Lord Oscar? and the yellow, faded paper? and the very words that Undine spoke?"

"Perhaps I can assist in solving all that. Bertrand, you never knew your father was insane the last six-months of his life. We kept it from every one but the attending physician, who can testify to the truth of my assertion. It is very more than likely that he, who was, like yourself, of a superstitious, romantic turn, had prepared that manuscript, with all the cunning of insanity, in moments when he was sufficiently sane to remember his prevailing characteristics. As to the paper, there still remain quires, that Lord Oscar brought from over the water; it is in the secretary in your father's study, where he spent most of his time. The signatures may, or may not be, good *fac-similes*; how should you know? The jewel that has been seen on this adventuresome girl's hand is the only deplorable thing in the whole affair. I am sorry it is not in our possession. Depend upon it, it was stolen, and by this girl, who, I plainly see, wants you to marry her. Further, perhaps you will find that the manuscript has also disappeared, together with the ring, and the same person has taken both. The executor may have mentioned the affair to some one, by which it reached her ears. She obtained the letter; after that, what is easier than to work upon a mind inclined to regard every thing as mysterious? Once more, Bertrand, why, if you were never to marry on account of this 'Florian,' has this girl taken such pains to win you?"

Mrs. Haighte paused after this long speech; and Bertrand seized her hand in a rapture of delight.

"My mother, you are simply perfect! No lawyer could have elucidated a case so clearly, satisfactorily and naturally, as you have this. You have convinced me, mother; you have shamed me with your noble, sensible view of this affair, and I will bless you to the day of my death; I and my darling Crystel!"

"I have only shown you what you could not see alone. There needs but one proof; if I could see the letter I would at once recognize your father's writing. However, you need not wait until we find it before you seek Crystel and tell her the story as you have told me. If I survive the curse," she smiled as she said it, "and you see me at breakfast, you can ride to Edenwilde and arrange every thing anew. Now, my foolish boy, kiss me good-night, and let me go to decide either your misery or happiness."

Bertrand kissed her reverently; then he went to the corner-window of the library to watch the light in Crystel's window.

CHAPTER X. PREPARATIONS.

CRYSTEL ROSCOE, in her white cashmere morning wrapper, with its facings of orange satin, and buttons of inlaid gold and pearl, was sitting in her dressing-room that dull, cloudy November day, while Hellice, cheery and brave amid the storm of grief that had burst upon her timid sister, was arranging fairly white bows and rosettes of gossamer ribbons.

"See, what can be prettier for the flowers? So fleecy and feathery."

Crystel turned her eyes away from the basket of materials.

"It seems such a mockery, Hellice. It hurts me more than if Bertrand were dead to see you persistently going on preparing for a bridal that never can be."

Hot tears came stealing through the closed lashes, and her lips were quivering.

"That's all nonsense! Truly, Crystel, do you think for a moment I would cause you pain? Would I, a woman of my years, prepare for a wedding I felt never would occur? No, my sister, you know me better. I make these bridal favors because I *know* these will be needed on the twentieth of November, just as we expected they would be."

She cast a bright, encouraging glance at Crystel; but her head was turned from the glittering array.

"Do you know *why* I am so confident, Crystel, dear? Because, when I am once convinced that Bertrand will not seek counsel from his mother, I shall tell her myself all I know, and thus secure aid in unraveling this affair."

"And maybe— Oh, Hellice, am I dreaming? See, is that not him coming up the avenue? Tell me, or am I going crazy?"

Crystel's languor had turned to wild excitement. She sprang to the window, and stood gazing at Bertrand, as he galloped up to the house, waving his handkerchief, his handsome face all alight with the good news he brought.

"Of course it's Bertrand, and my word for it, he comes to clear up all this mystery. Crystel, my darling, don't cry so!"

Yet she was thankful she did weep, and Bertrand sprang through the French window in a tumult of pleasurable excitement.

"Crystel! Crystel! it's all right! thank God! I've only been the victim of a joke this time, all been explained!"

Then, when he could calm himself down, he related the story to them, while Hellice worked away at the bridal favors, and Crystel sat watching her lover, her sweet face momentarily losing its piteous sadness, and rapidly growing piquant and fair as before this sudden, short trouble.

"So I had better finish the bridal favors, Crystel? And here, Bertrand, I am going to pin one to your coat, to be your talisman against future danger."

And then, when, with exquisite delicacy, Hellice made an errand for more white ribbon, Bertrand took Crystel's hand on his breast, and, with her eyes reading his face, confessed what he had not told before Hellice: all his mad, wicked infatuation for the dark-eyed girl, whose consummate arts and bold adventure, they fully believed, had wrought all the mischief.

And when he besought her pardon, she kissed him, and trusted him as ever.

So the cloud, that seemed so dense it never could blow over, had disappeared as suddenly as it came; and joy reigned supreme at Edenwilde and The Towers.

All that bright, cool Friday evening, Undine Del Rose sat in Mrs. St. Havens' elegant parlors, waiting and wondering; now sure Bertrand Haighte would be there the next moment; now troubled and doubting, lest Clifford Temple had succeeded in turning him away from her.

She had looked forward to this evening all through the day, as the time that was so triumphantly to crown all her endeavors, and now, when the fagion was so near her thirsty lips, that Clifford Temple, of all men, the man she had been taught to hate, secret power over her—the man she had loved before she saw Bertrand, and whom she would again turn to, if by any dire fate she missed her chance of the heir of The Towers, to be suddenly and violently robbed of her lover, as she believed Bertrand to be, was almost maddening.

She was sitting beside the register, when footsteps echoing on the marble-floored hall, caused her to listen, with a delicious flush at the thought that he had come at last.

The door was thrown open by the footman; but it was not Bertrand, it was Clifford Temple.

Undine arose haughtily.

"I beg to be excused, sir. I am expecting company."

Clifford walked up to the marble mantel and leaned against it, watching the anger tide of color that ebbed and flowed under her clear skin.

"I know you are waiting for Mr. Haighte; but, as he returned to The Towers by the eight o'clock train, he desired me to excuse him. Undine, how dare you undertake this game?"

He suddenly spoke with a commanding tone.

"How dare you question me thus? If Mr. Haighte has gone away, it is because you have been poisoning him."

"Well, perhaps it is my fault; perhaps your own, in carrying your little game too far. Undine, you knew you were engaged to me when you denied it to-day. Why did you tell Mr. Haighte I was paying my addresses to Mrs. St. Havens, when you knew it was false?"

"Because I hated you so; and—yes, I'm not ashamed to say it—cared so much for him. There, Clifford Temple, are you satisfied?"

She sat, twisting her rings around and around, angry, mortified and wounded.

"I do not seek any satisfaction. I did not call for the purpose of angering you, but merely to warn you against prosecuting your plans further. Because, Undine, Bertrand Haighte has gone home to marry his sweetheart at Edenwilde."

Undine sprang from her chair like a tigress.

"That's false! He never shall marry her, so help me Heaven! You think to taunt me into a reconciliation with yourself!"

"Not at all. I hereby release you from your engagement to me; and with my withdrawal, you may be pleased to learn that I shall transfer my addresses to Miss Lurline Haighte."

A sudden pallor crept to the corners of her lips. Both gone!—no! she would rally yet!

She bowed sarcastically.

"Thank you most warmly. Present my compliments to the lady, also my condolences."

Clifford laughed.

"I never saw the jealous phase of your character before, Undine."

Her cheeks flamed instantly.

"Then you see it now; not of you, sir, but of one worthy of it. When you see me the bride of Bertrand Haighte you will agree with me."

Clifford walked up to her gravely, not unkindly.

"Undine, I will again warn you not to

continue this wild, wicked chase for a man you never can marry. Yes, Undine, were he heart-free to-day, and begged you to be his bride, I would see you laid in your coffin before you should marry him. Better that you died this hour than cherish a love for him longer. Undine, we have been lovers; I hope we are friends; therefore, take warning by my words—by Mrs. St. Havens' words; and believe me, that, sooner than see you standing beside him at the altar, I would take your life, and go down to my own grave with the stain of your heart's blood on my hands. That would be a mission of mercy to you and him."

Despite her raging anger, Undine listened, and wondered what he meant.

When she had gone to Crystel Roscoe, and told her almost the same story, she had not pitied the bewildered girl; now, when Clifford Temple was warning her, she began to understand dimly how Crystel had felt; and yet a wounded anger was uppermost in her heart, and a burning thirst for the accomplishment of her aims, be their result what it might be.

She said not a word when he had finished, but answered him by a cold bow, and an ominous gleaming of her black eyes.

After he had gone, she saw the wedding card he had accidentally forgotten.

Her whole figure shook as if swept by a tornado, as she held the pure white symbols of happiness in her hand, and her eyes seemed like a concentrated blaze of hidden fire as she read that the marriage between her only idol and Crystel Roscoe would occur on the twentieth of November, at Edenwilde, at 7 o'clock, P. M.

"And this is the end! this the sight I see, when I should have heard his lips call me his!"

She tore the cards into fragments with a savage satisfaction; then stamped on them in the uncontrollable fit of passion that had smitten her with its fiery hand.

Far into the morning hours she sat there; and then, as the little cuckoo clock chimed three, she arose from her low chair and sought her room.

"To-day is the last of October; I have a little time left me yet. We shall see how this ends, after all!"

In her room, just as the first faint sounds of life were breaking, she was handed a telegraph dispatch; and a fierce, ominous, yet withal triumphant delight shone in her eyes as she read:

"Annette Willoughby is wanted—sickness."

It was addressed to her own name.

(To be continued—Commenced in No. 53.)

The White Witch: OR, THE LEAGUE OF THREE. A STRANGE STORY OF AMERICAN LIFE.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.
AUTHOR OF "HEART OF FIRE," "WOLF DEMON,"
"SCARLET HAND," "ACE OF SPADES," ETC.

CHAPTER XIX. THE DETECTIVE'S OPINION.

MONTGOMERY comprehended the situation at a glance. He saw, though, that resistance was almost useless.

Then, before he had time to think what he should do, the masked figure, standing by his side, pressed a damp sponge upon his nostrils.

A peculiar incense filled the air. Montgomery's senses reeled, and wavered around him.

He realized that he was being put under the influence of some powerful drug.

He attempted to struggle against it, but the effort was useless. He could not move. Slowly, little by little, he sunk into forgetfulness.

Then all was a blank.

How long he remained in a state of stupor he could not tell, but when, with a start and shiver, he opened his eyes, the bright sunlight was streaming into his room.

Montgomery rose to a sitting posture and looked around him.

The events of the night seemed like a disordered dream, yet, when his glance fell upon the papers scattered carelessly about the floor and the opened safe, he comprehended that his dream was reality.

Montgomery hastily dressed himself, then proceeded to examine the room.

His own bunch of keys in the safe-door showed him how the midnight plunderers had obtained access to his valuables. They had taken the keys from his pocket while he slept under the influence of the potent drug.

Montgomery examined the safe, amazed, and well he might be, for he had been robbed of thirty thousand dollars in Government bonds.

For a moment after making the discovery Montgomery was stupefied. He could hardly realize the extent of the loss.

Then the warning of the mysterious woman, who had called herself the White Witch, flashed across his mind.

Her words were coming true.

The woman he loved had proved false to him; half his fortune was gone, and all within a month.

"There is more than chance in this!" he muttered. "So far she has predicted truly; is the rest of her speech as true? Am I fated to lose the other half of my fortune? Will my friends prove false to me? Forewarned they say is forearmed; but the warning has been of little service to me. I must send for a detective at once and try to capture these midnight visitors before they can dispose of their plunder."

Then the eyes of the young man were attracted by an open paper upon the floor. He picked it up and examined it. It was his insurance policy of his house. Carelessly, he noticed the date.

"It expires on the Tenth of October. I must see that it is renewed in season," he said. "If I have three enemies, as the White Witch says, they might take a fancy to set fire to my house some dark night, and I can't afford to lose ten thousand more. Fifty thousand dollars in two weeks is no joke even to a man worth a hundred thousand. If this goes on, another month may see me a beggar."

A cloud darkened Montgomery's brow. Despite his effort not to think of it, the mysterious warning of the White Witch was ever in his mind.

"Now for the detective," he said, as he sat down to his desk and penned a hasty note.

Then he proceeded down-stairs, gave the note to one of the servants with an order to deliver it instantly.

That done, he sat down to breakfast. He had locked his room-door after him so that

no one could disturb anything until the arrival of the officer.

During breakfast, Angus put a few careless questions to the old servant who attended to his wants and who had supreme charge of the household.

He soon discovered that no one in the house, except himself, had any knowledge of the midnight visitors.

Soon after Angus had finished his meal the detective arrived.

The officer was a tall, portly man, with a full beard and a clear, blue eye.

Angus conducted him to his sleeping chamber and then, briefly, explained why he had sent for him.

"Robbed, eh?" said the detective.

"Yes."

"Twenty thousand dollars?"

"No, thirty thousand."

"Any thing else gone?"

"No, not that I can discover."

"Two men?"

"Yes."

"How were they dressed?"

"Well, I can hardly say; the gas was burning very dimly; and about all I could see was the outline of their forms."

"Dark clothes?"

"Yes."

"Were they large or small?"

"The man who stood by my bed and who applied the sponge was, I should judge, something about my own size."

"And the other?"

"I did not notice him enough to see."

"What did they have on their heads?"

"Felt hats, I think."

The officer was noting Montgomery's answers down in his note-book.

"Not sure?"

"No."

"That will be 'compounding a felony,' eh?"

"Oh, bless you! That's common enough!" exclaimed the officer; "but I'm afraid that there isn't much hope. I'll keep my eyes on two or three of the gentlemen who operate in the bond-robbery line, and if I find one of them uncommon flush, I'll jest drop on him. Perhaps I may light on the right man by accident."

Then the detective took his departure. Montgomery paced up and down the room for a few minutes in silence.

"Can it be possible that the wild story of the League of Three has a tangible foundation—that three men are striking these terrible blows against me? It seems impossible, and yet—I am puzzled!"

Again Montgomery paced up and down the room. His brow was clouded; his lips firmly compressed.

"Would it be heaven that I could see this strange woman again!" he exclaimed, suddenly. "Perhaps I am a fool to allow this matter to occupy my mind to such an extent, and yet her words seem ever ringing in my ears. She said, too, that a woman who loved me better than she did her own life, was fated to bring me to ruin. Can she mean this beautiful French girl, Leone? And at that time, too, I had never met her. This looks like reading the future. Pshaw! it must be chance. I am as great an idiot to think of this stupid masquerading frolic as any old woman predicting fortune and misfortune from the dregs of a tea-cup."

Montgomery reasoned well, and yet he did not convince himself.

The predictions of the mysterious woman had come true so far, but the worst yet remained unfulfilled.

CHAPTER XX.

THE "COUNTESS" AND THE ADVENTURER. A WEEK went by, and Montgomery's search for the masked men who had so mysteriously robbed him had been a fruitless one.

In the week he had called twice upon the beautiful girl who had so strangely bewitched him.

At each interview the charm grew stronger and stronger.

Montgomery fancied, too, that Leone looked with eyes of favor upon him.

It was on a pleasant Saturday afternoon that O'Connell and Leone sat together in the apartment of the latter.

O'Connell had just entered the room. His face was flushed with triumph, and he flung himself carelessly into a chair.

"Well, Leone, our bark sails smoothly on the tide; we have done well, girl, and now we must hasten and complete our work."

"What do you mean?" asked Leone, slowly, a peculiar light shining in her dark eyes.

"Why, that the net is closing around the prey. You mean Angus Montgomery?"

"Yes, he loves you, Leone."

"I know it," said the girl, sadly.

"Ah! you do? Has he, then, declared his passion?"

"With his eyes, yes—"

"And his lips, no; eh?"

"Very true."

"And you are as deeply in love with him as he is with you?"

"Yes," slowly and sadly came the confession from the red lips of the girl.

"Leone, I've half a mind to let you have this man."

"You have?" and the girl looked at him with eager eyes.

"Yes, after I have done with him. See how generous I am!" and O'Connell laughed as he spoke.

"When you have done with him?"

"Yes; don't imagine that I'm going to strike at his life; oh, no! Two more blows I aim at him and then he's all my own."

"He would despise me if he knew the cowardly part that I am playing," Leone murmured, bitterly.

"He will never know it unless you choose to tell him yourself," O'Connell replied.

"These two blows will crush him to the earth, a ruined man; then he must leave New York—it is necessary for my plans. His presence here will defeat my aims. Let him fly to the Great West, where a future awaits the strong-armed man who is willing to wrest it from the bosom of the prairie. You can go with him. I will permit it, give you back the pledge that binds you to me. Nay more, I'll give you money to start you in your new life. Come, Leone, is not my offer a fair one?"

"Yes, for you." There was a little bit of sarcasm in the tones of the girl that stung the keen-witted adventurer.

"For me, eh?" and O'Connell's lip curled as he spoke.

"Yes; I will say frankly what is in my mind," replied Leone; "I never yet saw you show one little bit of mercy to any one that was in your power, and I did not believe that it was in your nature."

"But do you not believe it now?" he asked.

"If you are not deceiving me—"

"Why should I deceive you?" he cried, hastily. "Don't be childish, Leone. Whatever my faults may be, deception is not one of them, unless, indeed, I have an object to gain. Now then, what can I gain by pretending to give you up to this man?"

"I can not tell," replied Leone. "You attain the end you aim at by devious and secret paths. I can not follow you."

"And yet you have known me many years, Leone."

"Yes, and yet I do not think that I know you. You are changing, Lionel. You have always pursued your foes with a bitter and an undying hatred, and now—"

"I am willing to let one of my foes escape me," he said, finishing the sentence.

"Even more than that; I am willing to give him the woman who has been my companion through many long years, clouded by suffering. Who has been like a guardian angel to me. The girl who toiled all day long as a menial for the scanty pittance that I might throw away in the evening, in one little hour, at the gaming-table. See how noble I am! Why, I give him a treasure! You would work your fingers to the bone to keep him from want, and why? because you love him! What mystic charm is there in that passion? I have never felt it. I never saw the woman yet that I would make myself a slave for; nor the woman, excepting you, who would toil for me. Why is it that you have done so? Have you loved me as you now love him?"

Leone shook her head in reply.

"I thought not," he said with a cynical laugh. "Why then have you clung to me in all my desperate fortunes with fidelity?"

"Have you so soon forgotten the bond that binds me to you? You reminded me

of it when you forced me to act the part of a siren and lure Angus Montgomery to his ruin," she said with bitter accents.

"Oh, that is it, eh?"

"Because you pledged your word?"

"Yes; do you not?"

"And you believe in keeping your word?"

"Yes; do you not?"

"When it suits my purpose to do so," he replied with a careless laugh; "otherwise no. Then you will hold to your word?"

"Until you release me from it, yes," answered Leone, firmly.

"Leone, listen to me," said O'Connell, after remaining silent for a moment, apparently in deep thought. "I will give you back your word on the one condition, that you will play your part in this little comedy of my contriving to the end. Then, my designs accomplished, in reward for your services, I will release you from your pledge. You shall be free to go where you please and with whom you please; with Angus Montgomery, if you like."

Leone's countenance was flushed with joy at the words.

"You are not deceiving me?" she exclaimed.

"No, I'll keep my promise," he replied. Then he looked at her for a moment, an odd smile upon his face. "Why, Leone, you seem to be overjoyed at the prospect of leaving me."

"I will not deceive you; I am," replied the girl, honestly.

"All the old love gone?"

"Yes."

"And you love me no longer?"

Again Leone shook her head.

"No, eh?"

"Yes."

O'Connell made a wry face.

Leone was candid but not complimentary.

"Perhaps it is better so," he said, quietly. "And now that we have settled this little matter we will proceed to arrange the programme for the future."

"What is to be done?" Leone asked.

"You know that I have told you to try and make this young man love you and yet not give him a chance to declare his affection?"

"Yes, I have performed the task. He does love me and yet he has not declared his passion," Leone said.

"Now then, you must change your tactics. He must declare his love, and you—well, you can speak the truth; I know that it will be agreeable to you," said O'Connell, with a covert sneer.

Leone blushed crimson and cast down her eyes.

"You are shortly to have a great change in your fortunes," continued O'Connell.

Leone looked up in astonishment.

"You are the daughter of a French count, you know. Your venerable papa was killed at Saarbruck at the head of his regiment. Your property in the north of France has been managed by your father's steward and the income from it sent to you."

"Why do you repeat this tissue of lies?" asked the girl, her lip curling in scorn.

"I thought, perhaps, that you had forgotten your history," replied O'Connell, with his usual baffling smile.

"I have not."

"Ah, well; Leone, Countess of Epernay—or to speak more correctly, Viscountess of Epernay, for you are the daughter of a count and not his wife—we are still keeping up the fable, you know. A great misfortune has befallen you."

"Indeed?" Leone saw that the cunning wit of the adventurer had in reserve some clever device.

"Yes, a terrible misfortune," said O'Connell; "those horrible Prussians have eaten up all your property."

Leone looked at O'Connell in astonishment.

"I do not understand—"

"Of course not; wait and you shall. When I say that they have eaten up your property, I mean that they have destroyed it. The French troops retreating before the German army occupied your chateau and endeavored to make a stand there. Their action brought on a battle—a terrible fight, and the result was that your beautiful chateau was burnt to the ground, your domain devastated and destroyed, and you are now a beggar; a stranger, too, in a strange land."

Then O'Connell paused, looked at Leone's bewildered face and laughed.

"And am I to tell this story?"

"Yes, of course."

"But the object?"

"Only a whim of mine," said O'Connell, carelessly.

"But I do not understand!" exclaimed Leone, in wonder.

"I will explain. This story is not to be told at present; it is for the future. First, you lead Montgomery to tell you that he loves you—declare the passion that is raging in his breast. Then you will tell him that you return his love—the truth, by the way, Leone."

Again the girl cast down her eyes before his sneering gaze, and the warm blood flushed her white cheek.

"And after enjoying the happiness, that these mutual vows will give, for a few days, then you will receive a letter from France which will relate all the melancholy particulars of the destruction of your ancestral home," continued O'Connell. "You will be deeply affected at the news; of course, you will tell your affianced husband, for Montgomery will occupy that position by that time—all the terrible news; that you are penniless, far from home and friends."

"Yes?" Leone's brow contracted; she began to see the drift of the scheme.

"Of course there is but one way open to him—"

"You mean that I am to rob him of his money and give it to you?" cried Leone, indignantly.

"That's an ugly word that you are using," replied O'Connell, coolly. "Besides, you could hardly take from him more than a couple of hundred dollars without appearing to trespass upon his generosity, and what do I care for a paltry sum like that?"

"What then is the scheme?"

"He will press money upon you; you will refuse at first; then—afterward—after repeated urging, you will consent to receive some slight assistance from him. But, to receive vulgar money, oh, no! But if he will sign a blank check and leave it with you, you will fill it out with the sum that you think will suffice for your wants."

"But still I do not understand," said Leone, in a maze.

"Then you will give the check to me."

"What will you do with it?"

"Oh, keep it to look at," replied O'Connell, carelessly.

"Is this not a trick—a trap?" she questioned.

"Oh, what a thing suspicion is!" O'Connell exclaimed; "what use can I put the check to? When he signs that check he will be a ruined man. What further damage can I do him when my aim is to spare his life and strike only at his fortune?"

"Well, as you please; you are my master," said Leone, slowly and sadly.

"Until I resign you to the arms of Angus Montgomery."

CHAPTER XXI.

ANOTHER BLOW.

LEONE did not reply.

O'Connell watched her for a few moments in silence.

"Leone," he said, suddenly, "do you expect any visitors before evening?"

"No," she replied.

"And this evening?"

"Yes."

"Montgomery?"

"Yes," and again the rich color deepened in the cheeks of the girl.

"Leone, I'm utterly worn out. May I rest on your sofa for an hour or so? I was up all last night."

"Throwing your money away at the gaming-table again?" said the girl, disdainfully.

"Yes and no, both in a breath!" replied O'Connell, in his careless way. "I was a devotee at the shrine of la belle goddess, Fortune, but I didn't throw my money away. On the contrary, the fickle jade smiled on me and I won largely. Fortune is rightly represented by a woman, for she smiles on the man in the sunshine and turns her back in cold disdain upon the poor wretch in the shadow," and with this not very complimentary speech—as far as the female sex are concerned—O'Connell stretched himself out upon the sofa.

Leone left the window, and drawing a rocking-chair to the head of the sofa sat down in it.

With her little hand she smoothed back the crispy, silken curls that clustered on the broad, pale forehead of O'Connell.

As the young man lay, extended at full length upon the sofa, he seemed a perfect representative of glorious manhood.

The quick, expressive muscles of the face were now in repose. There was a mental beauty in the features that one would never have dreamed of when the eyes were open and the lips moving.

"Do you think your words apply to me, Lionel?" asked the girl, softly bending over him, her hand tangled in the crispy, silken locks.

O'Connell opened his eyes and looked up into the beautiful face, bent down so near his own.

"Leone," he said, after a moment's pause, "there are exceptions to every rule. You are an angel, if ever there was one on this earth. I am not worthy to be by your side, yet I have forced you to do my will, to aid me in my desperate schemes. I am sorry that I am obliged to do so, but I can not help it. Fate has placed you in my power; you must serve me. The day, though, is not far distant when you will be the happy wife of the man that you love so well. No more perilous schemes then, no more the 'sea-sick bark' will dash on the breaking rocks; all will be peace, rest and love. Is not the future bright, Leone, after all the danger and darkness of the past?"

"Yes," murmured the girl, slowly.

"Keep up your heart then; bear with my unyielding temper but a few weeks more—perhaps only a few days—and then you shall enjoy the blessing of a pure and holy love. I know that such a love does exist, and transforms earth into heaven, although I have never felt it."

"And perhaps I never shall," said Leone.

"Why, what can prevent it? I know that the man to whom you have given your heart loves you in return. Know that he will gladly marry you."

"Will he if he knows the past?" whispered Leone, bending her head until her dark locks mingled with the golden curls of O'Connell.

"That is a difficult question to answer," said O'Connell, thoughtfully. "If he loves you as well as I think he does, he will. He will forgive all, take you to his heart and cherish you as you deserve to be cherished."

"Oh, if I could only think so!" murmured the girl, sadly.

"But, how can he ever know the past? It is buried in our breasts. No power can dig it up. I shall hold my tongue, and of course you will yours," O'Connell said, quickly.

"Marry him without his knowing of the past?" asked the girl, a shudder shaking her slight form.

"Certainly," replied O'Connell, quickly.

"What has he to do with your past life? Nothing! Make him so happy in the future that he will never dream of asking in regard to the past."

"But, would it not be cruel to deceive him?" Leone asked.

"All women deceive men in something."

"I can never deceive him," said Leone, firmly.

"No?" said O'Connell, in astonishment.

"Do you think that I could be happy with him with this terrible secret tearing at my heart?" she asked, her face plainly showing how deeply she was affected. "It would turn to torture all the bliss that his love could give me."

"Why, you foolish girl, would you tell him everything?" said O'Connell, in wonder.

"Yes; before he marries me he shall know all my past life. If he chooses to forget and forgive, then his love will make me happy," replied Leone.

"Well, it wouldn't make any difference to me," said O'Connell, thoughtfully. "It is not your fault but mine. By the way, Leone, now that I think of it, just you keep this matter quiet until you are away from New York. Montgomery, even if he chooses to overlook it, may have some insane idea of calling me to an account for my share in it."

"I promise," replied Leone.

"Do you know, Leone," said O'Connell, suddenly, and looking up in the girl's face, "there was a time when I thought that you would never love any one in the world but me? You have changed."

"Yes," and Leone pushed back the yellow curls and imprinted a soft kiss upon the massive, white forehead.

"You no longer love me?"

"No."

"What has changed you?"

"Oh, Lionel! can you not guess?" said the girl, sorrowfully.

A peculiar expression shot across O'Connell's face, then he closed his eyes.

"Let me sleep, Leone, that's a good girl," he said.

Silence held possession of the room.

In five minutes, Lionel O'Connell was fast asleep.

Leone watched him with an anxious look, resting her arm upon the head of the sofa and her head upon her hand.

For fully a quarter of an hour Leone remained motionless, watching the sleeper.

Then O'Connell turned restlessly on his side, his lips opened; he muttered a name. Leone bent her head to listen.

O'Connell was talking in his sleep.

At five o'clock O'Connell awoke, and then took his departure.

Coming out of the hotel, he met Tulip and Stoll.

He joined them and all three went down the street together.

"Every thing going all right?" asked Stoll, cautiously.

"Yes," replied O'Connell. "Why, man, the game was in our hands from the first."

"One thing astonishes me," said Tulip.

"And what is that?" asked O'Connell.

"About those bonds. I felt sure that Montgomery had at least thirty thousand dollars' worth."

"And yet there was but twenty in the safe," said O'Connell.

"Are you sure that you secured all?" asked Stoll.

"Yes, I think so; but still, there might have been some secreted in the safe that I overlooked in the hurry of the search," replied O'Connell, thoughtfully.

"But, Stoll," he continued, "did you succeed in disposing of all of them?"

"Yes, I've got the money in my pocket," replied the broker. "We'll go in somewhere, get a private room, and then we can settle up the transaction."

"Montgomery hasn't made much noise about his loss," O'Connell said.

"He hasn't made any at all," observed Tulip.

"Probably, though, he has the detectives on the watch."

"And much good it will do him," said Stoll, with a coarse chuckle.

"It was a lucky thought of yours, O'Connell, to steal the list containing the number of the bonds," Stoll remarked.

"Yes; if Montgomery had had the list, and had made it public, we couldn't have put a single bond on the market," said the broker.

"We have played a bold game, and so far, we have been very successful," O'Connell said, thoughtfully.

"Satan himself seems to aid us," observed Tulip; "why, Stoll, Montgomery laid his bunch of keys down carelessly, upon the table, and O'Connell picked them up without being seen. So you see we secured entrance both to the house and safe without trouble."

"Yes; but, gentlemen, have you ever considered that we are rendering ourselves liable to go to the State prison at Sing Sing?" said Stoll, with a shiver.

"Not if we are true to each other," replied O'Connell, coldly. "The one who betrays the league knows his fate. Besides, nearly all the personal risk is over; one more blow and then we do our work by deputy."

"When do we strike the next blow?" Tulip asked.

"To-night."

"So soon?"

"Yes, I am eager to finish the matter. It will not take long now," O'Connell replied.

"The sooner it is finished the better!" Stoll exclaimed.

"You are resolved, gentlemen, to abide by our compact and push the matter to the bitter end?" O'Connell said.

"Yes," Tulip replied, firmly.

"Certainly," added Stoll.

"Nothing, but the complete ruin of this man can satisfy our vengeance!"

"Nothing else!" said Tulip, in a quiet way, but in a voice full of determination.

"My idea, exactly," said Stoll.

Few, to look at the three men, strolling so carelessly down Broadway, would have guessed that they were plotting the ruin of a man, who believed two of them at least to be his friends.

Life is sometimes a huge masquerade. Angus Montgomery, after spending a delightful evening with Leone, the fair enchantress, whose beauty had cast such a spell over his heart, retired to rest early.

Busy thoughts were in his mind, and he lay awake until after the clock struck twelve; then, slumber closed his eyes.

He had not slept an hour when he was suddenly aroused from his slumbers by the startling cry of "Fire!" coming from the street below.

Montgomery leaped from the bed and hurriedly dressed himself, as he felt sure, from the noise, that the fire was near.

He was about half-dressed, when the old servant, who had charge of the household, rushed into the room without the ceremony of knocking.

Montgomery had turned up the gas on rising, and by its light he noticed

MOTHER'S WIG.

BY QUANT.

Poets have sung in deathless rhyme
Of rales of the olden time;
Clock, Buckle, Arm-Chair too;
But I will sing of Mother's Wig,
That for her head was much too big,
And always was askew.

She smoothed it down her placid face,
But never would it keep its place,
Yet mildly beamed her eye;
For, gentle soul, she never thought
Of blaming him of whom she bought
The wig that sat awry.

How often have I watched her sit
Trying in vain to make it fit
As decent wigs should do;
Alas! it would curl up behind,
Or on her forehead oddly bind,
And always was askew.

Sweet, sacred lessons she'd impart,
Striving to fix them on my heart,
Whilst we o'erstayed her brow;
Appealing to my childish mind,
With winning words and tones so kind,
I almost see her now.

The wig—ah, me! I thought it grew;
At last it would no longer do
And just ere mother died
She got another one—it fit,
And this (no longer using it)
Was quickly laid aside.

The cast-off wig, I have it here,
Although it seems a relic queer,
With it I'll never part;
For as upon the braids I gaze,
My thoughts go back to happy days,
And warm my world-worn heart.

Mother's dear presence comes to me
Chanting a low, sweet lullaby,
Just as she used to do,
Bending above my childish face,
Calm eyes and form of willowy grace,
And always wig askew.

Mother! my heart is calling thee,
I crave the love long gone from me
With ever yearning cry;
My feet have trod in thorny ways,
Since last I met thy brown eyes' gaze
From beneath the wig awry.

Now as I clasp the senseless hair,
My soul is thronged with memories rare,
Of thee and days gone by,
The fount is touched and I must weep—
Ah! none need smile because I keep
The wig that sat awry.

The Outlaw Duped.

A SKETCH OF TEXAN LIFE.

BY JOSEPH E. BADGER, JR.

TEXAS might truly be called the "rogues' paradise" at the time of which we write, 1850. "Horse-dealers"—to give them their own chosen title—gamblers and counterfeiters, to say nothing of villains of still blacker grades, were predominant; and as a general thing ruled matters with a high hand. Honest men scarcely dared utter their sentiments, and often submitted to bold swindling, or even barefaced robbery, rather than to call down upon their heads worse evils by useless resistance.

But all were not of this sort. Many stoutly defended their own, and then came the tug of war. You may yet hear the story of brave deeds and cunning ruses enacted by the hardy settlers; and it is a true story that we chronicle here.

Situated near the bank of one of the confluent of the river Brazos, were several farms, both stock and grain, whose owners had chosen to settle together, the better to defend themselves and property. Their most dreaded enemy, and the scourge of the country for miles around, was a daring desperado known as "Cock-eyed Jack Wingrow," so called from a peculiar twist in his visual organs.

Some few years after the planters alluded to had located there, this person made his appearance, together with a squad of men, numbering, perhaps, a dozen all told; rough, determined-looking fellows.

Jack and his men built a large, heavy log-house, almost against a high bank of clay and sand-stone, a few miles distant from the first settlers. But, when the house appeared completed, work still went on, night and day, the men laboring by relays.

Such proceedings, as a matter of course, excited not a little curiosity, and more than one of the farmers tried to solve the mystery. But they were never allowed to enter, nor, indeed, to approach the building, within gunshot, although the strangers appeared civil enough, otherwise. And then, at the end of several months, the strangers threw off the mask and appeared in their true colors.

They freely helped themselves to such stock as they most fancied, and when one settler, James Agden, resisted, a pistol-shot shattered his right arm, and left him a cripple for life. The farmers then numbered but half a dozen men, all told, and they could do nothing against the ruffian-band.

Thus matters went on from bad to worse. The outlaw gang grew stronger, and more bold, as they encountered but little resistance. But Cock-eyed Jack Wingrow, king as he was among his men, had to succumb at last, and what armed force could not do, the bright eyes and pretty face of a maiden accomplished.

Mabel Craythorne was the only child of the richest stock-grower of the settlement. Her father had suffered severely by the marauding outlaws, and was still suffering from a bad wound, before he gave up in despair. But one day Wingrow caught sight of Mabel, and he did not escape without injury. Her bright back eyes, her vowed, were more than so many rifle-bullets; they pierced the fossil that he called his heart, and he was vanquished.

Knowing that his life was safe, while his men remained to avenge him, he boldly called at the house of old Cyrus Craythorne, and made a proposal. He offered to cease troubling the settlement, and to protect them from other outlaws, provided Mabel should become his wife. The indignant reply of the old man did not abash him in the least, and he took his departure, saying that he would expect their answer in one month's time. If he accepted his offer, well and good; if not he would "clean out" the place and possess her anyhow.

At first Mabel only laughed at the idea, for not only was the "Cock-eyed" outlaw fearfully ugly, in face as well as character, but her heart was already disposed of. George Maylie was only a poor herdsman of her father's, but he was a true-hearted and brave young man, as Mabel had found out. They learned to love each other, but as yet it was a secret from the father. A hot-blooded Georgian, he would have been scandalized at the idea.

George mustered up courage at the outlaw's threat, and asked the hand of his employer's daughter. As soon as his astonishment would permit, Mr. Craythorne bade him be gone, adding that if he would break up the gang of desperadoes, he might then

renew his proposal, thinking that this would be a final veto. But it was not.

The young folks managed to meet, and out of their despair grew a settled plan. As a first move, Mabel one day mounted her horse and rode down the creek. When once beyond sight of the house, her animal's head was turned toward the hill where stood the outlaw stronghold! Approaching it, she rode slowly, and nerved herself for the trial. As she anticipated, Wingrow was "at home," and came out from the building with a would-be fascinating smile upon his hirsute visage.

"Good-mornin', Miss," the outlaw bowed, "how's the family?"

"Quite well, thank you. Mr. Wingrow, I believe?"

"Yas; so you know me?"

"I saw you at our house, not long since. But I am very thirsty—can you tell me where I can get some water?" softly smiled Mabel.

"Thar's some fresh in the shanty. I'll git it, ef—"

"Oh, Mr. Wingrow, please let me go too! I've such a curiosity to see what it is you keep so secret in there. Besides, I am only a girl—I could not do you any harm, if I would," eagerly pleaded Mabel, with another glance from her bright eyes, that she so well knew how to use.

"I don't know—the boys mightn't like it," hesitated the outlaw.

"You are master—surely you do not care what they say! I don't believe you are afraid of what they think?"

"Jack Wingrow afeerd? nary time he aint; let 'em say what they darned please! Let me help you to 'light.'"

But Mabel adroitly avoided the proffered assistance, and, springing lightly to the ground, she followed the desperado into the house. While he placed her a chair and hastened to fetch the water, Mabel took a quick survey of the room.

It was fitted up in rude style of comfort, but the walls were literally covered with weapons; rifles, shot-guns, pistols and sabers in profusion. A passing glance was all she received, but her eyes dwelt longest upon the doorway where Wingrow had disappeared. This was apparently the entrance to an underground vault. Then, hearing the steps of the outlaw returning, Mabel hastily picked up a tasty morocco belt from the mantle, containing a brace of richly mounted pistols.

"Oh, Mr. Wingrow, where did you get those? They're just what I've been want-

ing for so long! You must bring them over some time for father to buy for me—won't you?"

"Do you like 'em? Ef you do, they're your'n—or anythin' else I've got. Please take 'em—I'll be right hurt if you don't," eagerly replied Jack, and then as Mabel hesitated, he clumsily buckled the belt around her waist.

He was blindly drunk at being so kindly treated, or else he would have noted how Mabel shuddered at contact with his paws. But, she had a part to play, and soon conquered the feeling. From step to step she led the outlaw on until he repeated his offer, and Mabel hesitated—so admirably that a far more acute man than Wingrow would have been deceived.

"Well, I hardly know. Father has taken such a foolish dislike to you, that I know he would not consent. I should dearly like such a life; why it would be equal to being a queen!"

"You kin be a queen over us, ef you like," stammered Jack, in an ecstasy of delight.

"But father—"

"You w'dn't let him know anythin' about it ontel it's too late. Run off, an' then he'll be to knuckle under," suggested Wingrow.

"I don't know—well, I'll think it over and let you know. I will be out riding almost every day, and this is the pleasantest way I know," murmured Mabel, with another glance; fibbing most outrageously, but consoling herself with the thought that it was in a good cause.

Gracefully effecting her escape, Mabel rode slowly homeward, with a sickening feeling of disgust, mingled with exultation. The bird had blindly entered the first trap.

Day after day passed on, and while outwardly events pursued their usual course, Mabel's plot was progressing rapidly. Indeed, it required all her skill and tact to keep Jack Wingrow in proper subjection. He could not see why one time was not as good as another, when once fully convinced that Mabel had resolved to set her father's will at defiance, and make a moonlight flitting of it, if milder means would not work.

But, she was equal to the task; and, once fairly started in the scheme, Mabel experienced a strange, wild pleasure in thus duping the infatuated outlaw.

George Maylie had found no difficulty in securing employment with one of the neighbors, and the lovers could then meet frequently, in order to discuss their great undertaking as well as other and more tender topics. George had taken his employer into their confidence, and had selected several

others whom he knew to be trustworthy and upon whose aid he relied at the moment of action.

Mabel had several times visited the outlaw's cabin, when assured by Wingrow that the men would all be out of the way, and had thus gained a thorough knowledge of the interior of the vault as well as building. The outlaw chief had at length persuaded her, with great apparent difficulty, to consent to an elopement, when they were to hasten as fast as horses' feet could carry them to the nearest settlement, where the knot could be legally tied, and the rage of her father successfully braved.

According to their plans, Jack Wingrow was to appoint himself as guard upon that particular night. But one was needed, at any time, to act as such, for the cabin was so strongly built that an entrance could scarcely be effected by force, even if undetected. But with a half-score stout fellows at hand they could—as they thought—effectually defy any force that might be brought against them. This number of men always slept within the vault where the more valuable articles were stored, for that purpose.

Mabel was to arrive at about midnight, and rap lightly upon the door. Wingrow would open, and then, mounting their steeds, would leave the cabin to care for itself until their flight be discovered. This was the plot, so far as the outlaw knew it.

Cyrus Craythorne was still an invalid from the effects of his wound, and had not been taken into the plan for several reasons, and thus Mabel was free to work out her scheme. The appointed night came at length, and all was ready. The moon would not arise until late—a fact that had been taken into consideration—and, fortunately, the sky was shrouded in dense clouds, rendering all objects below obscure and dim.

Mabel and George, leading their five companions, fully armed and resolved to conquer at all risks, rode out from the settlement and proceeded toward the outlaw stronghold. Mabel would come, despite the remonstrance of her lover, for fear that Wingrow would refuse to open the door unless he recognized her voice.

When near the cabin the little party dismounted and cautiously advanced, keeping well screened by the undergrowth and shadow of the hill, until the side of the building was reached. The men crept close to the door as they dared to, crouching low down in the shade. Then Mabel advanced and gave the designated signal.



THE OUTLAW DUPED.

A low voice called her by name, and as she replied, the door opened and Jack Wingrow emerged.

"Hist! don't make no noise. The boys is all asleep 'nd it's all hunky now. Let me—" and he strove to embrace the maiden, who avoided him and stepped back.

Like a hungry panther, George Maylie sprang forward and his strong hands clutched the throat of the astounded ruffian with a vice-like grip. Without a struggle, Wingrow was thrown down and hastily bound and gagged. Then the settlers' lamps entered the cabin and ignited the lamps until all within was light as day. The most dangerous part was yet to come; the sleeping outlaws were to be secured.

The heavy slab door leading into the vault was partially closed and secured; three men took their stations beside the entrance with clubbed rifles, while the others stood with ready revolvers commanding the doorway. Then George set up a loud cry of *fire!* The desperadoes, awakened by such a fearful alarm, flocked to the entrance, and the strong arms of the settlers did brave service. One after another fell like logs, while the young hero continued his cries. One man—the last one—avoided the blow, and realizing the truth, drew his revolver and fired one shot. It was his last, for a bullet pierced his skull, and he fell beside his unfortunate victim.

The rest was easy. A wagon was procured and the prisoners taken to the settlement, where the next day they were tried and condemned to death. The execution of the sentence was not long delayed.

The old gentleman was as good as his word, and a week afterward Mabel became the wife of—not the penniless herdsman, but a landed gentleman. Mr. Craythorne overcame his principal objection by deeding his land to George, as Mabel was his only child.

And since the signal success of "Mabel's ruse," that settlement has not been to any degree troubled with outlaws.

AN ANCIENT TIME-KEEPER.

A WATCHMAKER in Meriden, Conn., has on exhibition in his shop an old watch, with only a hour hand and a common catgut for a winding-chain. It has a brass case, but was originally inclosed in a huge tortoise shell. The inscription on the watch is, "W. Lee, No. 2, 1658," making it 213 years old, undoubtedly the oldest running watch in America. It keeps excellent time, not varying two minutes a week.

Camp-Fire Yarns.

Deaf Smith.

BY RALPH RINGWOOD.

"Did I know Deaf Smith? Well I reckon. Why, boyee, I wur his comrade all through the 'tussel w' the yaller bellies under the old wooden-legged greaser, St. Anner, an' arterwards we struck hands fur two seasons, trappin'."

"They say he was stone deaf, Jim. Is that so?" asked one of the boys.

"I dunno as I knows *exactly* what yur means by stone deaf," replied Curtis, "but I doose know that ef he couldn't hear he could come so nigh to it thet thar wur'n't no fun in it. Thar ain't a red-skin, no ner a white 'un neither, thet ever lived as could git in arm's re'ch uv Deaf Smith an' him not know it. The ole war-hoss thought a power uv him."

"Who was the ole war-hoss?"

"Why, Sam Houston, thet's who it wur. 'Ee must be a greeny not to know him by that name. But 'bout Deaf Smith. I'll tell yur uv a leetle sarcircumstance es took place durin' the war, in which he wur consarned summat, ef you'll all stop gabblin' fur a spell."

"All right, Jim! we're mum! go ahead," and instantly every eye was on the old ranger, and every tongue silent.

"Fust off, I hev to tell yur how Deaf kim to kate the yaller bellies the way he did, fur I tell yur thet he wur down on 'em jess wuss nor a black snake an' down onto a rattler, an' thet ain't no small shakes yur know."

"Yur sez Deaf he hed a squaw, one uv them 'ere sweethearts es they calls 'em, an' she lived long w' her ole daddy, away up on the Perdinallies, sumwhar 'bove Austin. He wur powerful fond uv the gail; she wur a pretty thing to look at an' no mistake, an' they wur gein' to join kists fur the balance uv the season, next year. The very night thet Deaf sez her last, he'd been up thar courtin' like, yur know, an' afore he'd hardly got outen sight uv the ranch, Cervally an' his gang uv cut-throats bu'st onto 'em, an' in less'n no time the ole man an' the ole woman, an' the gail, wur all rubbed out."

"The cowardly skunks killed the poor woman, an' she nigh about a-dyin' ennyhow."

"We got the news at the forks, clost by

we *did* promis', an', what's more, we par-formed the work. We did thet!"

"While I wur fixin' the hosses, Deaf went off arter a c'uple uv axes, an' in five min-its arter the General hed sent fur us, we wur off to ards the south-west 's'ff the devil wur arter us. How we rid thet night! Remember, boyees, 'twur arter midnight when we started, an' et the fust crack o' day, we sighted, close by, the timber on 'Clato creek."

"We got good kiver, an' I stalked the bridge, an' shore anuff thar sot ten uv the yaller bellies a-guardin' uv it."

"The odds wur hefty, but the ole man hed sed the bridge must kim down, an' we'd 'a' downed it ef thet'd 'a' been a hundred uv 'em thar."

"Jim," sez Deaf, 'arter we shoots there'll on'y be eight uv the niggers. Kin we manage 'em handy?"

"I jess nodded sartainly, an' we rid up to the edge uv the timber an' picked out our persimmon." Deaf he truck the ossifer, an' I drewed on a big, smoky-lookin' cuss es hed a c'uple uv pistols stuck into his sash.

"Drap him in his tracks, Jim," sed Deaf. "I wants them pop-guns."

"You see, he war standin' right onto the bridge, jess *whar* we wur a-goin'."

"I see what Deaf wur arter, an' when we pulled on 'em meat jess laid down, quiet like, right on thet plank, an' Deaf's fell over into the creek. You ought to 'a' seen them greasers when we broke kiver an' charged 'em squar' down! I swar 'twur funny, but they mighty soon changed my lart, I tell you."

"They stood it, though, better'n most uv 'em would 'a' done, an' afore we'd got half across the open, they slapped a volley bang into us, an' over I went, hoss an' all, onto the perrary, the mustang c'lar gone, an' me with a cussed scopot ball right through my shoulder, heyr."

"I wur done fur, an' I sed it, so I jess riz up onto my 'tother arm an' watched Deaf. Good lordy, boyees! ef enny uv yur ever sez a mad grizzly surrounded by the dogs an' bad wounded, you kin guess what Deaf looked like es he 'rared an' tared 'mong them er yaller bellies."

"They stood up, fust rate I will say, an' met him half-way on the bridge, but they mout jess es well 'a' not done it, fur he rode clean through them, swingin' thet hefty ax same es ef it hed been a Comanch' tommy-hawk."

"Right an' left he struck es he went through, an' when he wheeled fur to come ag'in thar warn't but *six* uv the greasers left, an' I sez they wur gettin' skeery."

"The next time two on 'em grupp'd the mustang's head an' hilt her a minit, jess long Deaf fur Deaf to slide down an' begin to work afoot, an' then they let her go. You kin bet they let the critter go."

"I swar to you, boyees, thet the man looked a heap more like a red hot devil nor he did like a human critter."

"Them six Mexikins piled onto him jess like mad bumbly bees."

"They jabbed him w' the'r long lances, they slashed him w' the'r cussed machets, they rattled him an' fou't him all over, but he wur too much fur 'em arter all."

"By this time I'd foddered my rifle, an' putty soon I got a chance, an' restin' her onto the karkidge uv my mout, I throwed another nigger in his track."

"'Hooray!' sez Deaf, an' he went at 'em wuss nor ever."

"By-em-by he fit round to whar the feller es I hed shot fust off lay, an' quicker'n greased lightnin' he hed both pistols outen the imp's sash, an' a minit arterwards he used 'em, both uv 'em, an' then ag'in thar wur'n't but jess three uv the varmints left."

"Seven down, boyees, jess think uv it, an' him alive an' fightin' wuss'n ever."

"The last dose was too much fur them es wur left. They weakened right down, an' let out fur the timmer on 't'her side uv the creek."

"Deaf knowed he wouldn't hev no time to foller, so he grups the ax an' begins slatherin' away on the ole bridge."

"Lordy, how he did make the chips fly, but he war soon interrupted, jess es I expected he'd be. I reckoned the greasers'd stop in the timmer an' open on him, an' shure anuff they did. Thar wur more of 'em, a whole company not fur off, an' they knowed the firing would soon bring 'em up."

"But Deaf didn't mind 'em no more'n ef they wur throwin' dornicks, not half es much. One arter another he chopped them timbers in two, and all the while the scopot balls wur sizzin about his top-knot."

"By-em-by I see him stagger like, but he never stopped slatherin' away, until the last log fell an' the bridge wur ruined."

"Then he stopped, run over an' ketched his own hoss, an' one fur me, an' putty soon he hed me in the saddle, a-headin' fur camp."

"We wur'n't two hundred yards from the place when the greasers kim slashin' up, but they didn't foller us. They wur afeard uv an ambushment."

"Deaf hed ben hit three times by the cusses, an' one uv them copper bullets like to 'a' finished him, but he didn't keer much fur thet when, arter the battle, thet day, the ole man said, arter the whole army, thet Deaf Smith hed won Jacinto fur him."

Beat Time's Notes.

I was very precocious. At two years of age I learned Dutch of my cousin-german; I studied Navigation in a mud-puddle, played on a drum like a regular drummajor, studied arithmetic and emetic, was versed in prose, proficient in history and distory, found sermons in stones when I threw them against a meeting-house, knew the geography of the pantry, and survived it all.

A MAN walking at the rate of four miles an hour drops his pocket-book; I, walking five miles an hour, come along and pick it up. How far would I go to give it to him again?

If I can eat one pound of beef in fifteen minutes, how long will it take me to eat a whole ox?

If apples were worth nothing, how many could you get for a cent?

Is not a fat man's body an example of Compound Proportion?

Two pints make one quart.

Four quarts make one drunk.

THE artist who painted my picture will never be arrested for counterfeiting, but he might be arrested for slander.

All eggs are of the female persuasion because they are hen-gendered.